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BUILDING CASTLES IN THE AIR:  
A DISCUSSION OF THE ARCHITECTONIC LANGUAGE OF THOUGHT  
AND THE LIMITS OF POSTMODERNISM

By

Monica Krupinski

B.A., Marshall University, 1990

M.A., West Virginia University, 1993

M.A., West Virginia University, 2000

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities

Department of Humanities

University of Louisville

Louisville, KY

May 2015



"  
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A Dissertation Approved on

April 17, 2015

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my Mother,  
who never doubted me for a second,  
and to my son, Devin “Bubi” Smith,  
who teaches me something new every day.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I want to thank my committee for all of their valuable commentary and guidance: my Chair, Dr. Mark Blum, who is an inspiration to me both as a scholar and more importantly as a human being; Dr. Annette Allen, who always encouraged my creativity no matter what (quirky) form it took; Dr. Nancy Potter, who kept me on the straight and narrow with caring and tough love; and Dr. Steven Skaggs, who changed my perspective at just the right moment. Their support and patience meant everything to me. Also, many others at the University of Louisville provided me with inspiration and encouragement in so many ways, including Professor Elaine Wise and Dr. Shelley Salamensky, as well as my fellow graduate students Julie Marie Wade, Amy Tudor, and especially Carol Stewart, who was a real friend when I needed one most. In addition I want to thank Tina Wells, my sister, who survived hearing all about this dissertation (and everything else) on a daily basis and actually managed to sound interested the whole time. Finally, it goes without saying (though I'll state his name anyway) that I owe the most to Elijah Pritchett, my favorite interlocutor (I hate that word) and my very good friend (ahem), who has always been just enough to drive me crazy.

ABSTRACT

BUILDING CASTLES IN THE AIR:  
A DISCUSSION OF THE ARCHITECTONIC LANGUAGE OF THOUGHT  
AND THE LIMITS OF POSTMODERNISM

Monica Krupinski

April 17, 2015

The purpose of this dissertation is to suggest a platform for the investigation and discussion of the process of structuring thought in the Western tradition through the use of architectonic language. This platform will incorporate elements of not only physical structures but also the roles of metaphor and particularly memory as evidence of the architecturally-based framing of our thinking about thinking in addition to the ways in which that thinking has changed as a result of pluralist influences. The discussion will include a tracing of the largely uninvestigated but always present architectonic language of thought, a discussion of the problematic nature of memory upon that structuring, and an analysis of the role of inscription and metaphor in that same scope. It will

culminate in an application of the process in a comparison of two works of memorial architecture to make evident the ways in which architecture and thought are bound together and exhibit the elements discussed throughout the dissertation in an attempt to situate the contemporary moment in our thinking through a comparison of historical Modernism and Postmodernism.



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## INTRODUCTION

Architecture is the reaching out for the truth. – Louis Kahn<sup>1</sup>

What people want, above all, is order. – Stephen Gardiner

In Raymond Carver's 1983 short story *The Cathedral*, the main character struggles to describe the appearance of a cathedral to a blind man. After fumbling around with words for a time, relying only on vague descriptors like "big" and "massive" before switching to the non-descriptive explanation that people built them to be closer to God, at the suggestion of the blind man, he draws a cathedral on paper. The drawing begins with a simple shape not unlike a house, but soon windows, spires, buttresses and arches are added until the drawing approximates the traditional structure in all its excess. Though the main character reveals himself to be no artist, the blind man traces the completed drawing carefully with his fingers and pronounces, "I think you got it". What words failed to express, form made understood.

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<sup>1</sup> Both Louis Kahn (American) and Stephen Gardiner (British) were 20<sup>th</sup> Century architects.

Though this short story is not exactly about architecture, but more about communicating and achieving perspective, it certainly illuminates the difficulty we have in choosing adequate language without a visual or concrete reference to reflect architectural form and, more importantly, the extent to which we rely on a visually-recognizable structure as the foundation from which we explain our thoughts. Explaining the form rather than already *knowing* the form and using it to explain other concepts is, as the character demonstrates, not a familiar or comfortable situation and suggests a fissure or a gap in what language is able to express on its own. Without the use of an already-recognized structural form at its core, expression of thought becomes unnatural, ineffective, and imprecise.

The ordering of our thoughts and the patterns of our thinking are not structures we arrive at blindly, they are bound by analogy to a familiar form, a visual metaphor, a symbolic taking of shape or finding of ground. Without these methods of structure or form, without a concretely architectonic shaping of thought, expression becomes too stunted or too loose, hardly the positions from which significant ideas, metaphysical inquiries, and theoretical musings might be undertaken. Just as the explanation of a cathedral in the story could only be understood when it took the physical form of lines pressed into paper, explanations of our own thought can best be understood when they achieve a similar “physical” form—that of the architectural.

Truth and order may be the most fundamental and universal desires within human experience, yet often only reluctantly do we acknowledge the discipline of architecture as a base for an extension of those desires into the realm of the metaphysical. Culturally and popularly, architecture is often considered to be restricted by its very own purpose—the necessity of a concrete place and grounding somehow is seen to preclude its usefulness as a foundation for theoretical constructs—when arguably architectural language and metaphor can be viewed as the underlying framework for the Western philosophical tradition. Though philosophy depends heavily upon this architectonic infrastructure and language, the positioning of architecture has historically been relegated to a heuristic device, often acknowledged but not deeply interrogated. It is often a means of structuring thought that is almost too obvious or universal to warrant interrogation in its own right.

Certainly architects and philosophers have individually recognized the intersections of their disciplines, but culturally we have little space for the extension of those acknowledgements into our overarching mechanisms of thinking about our own thinking. We should have a platform for the discussion of these epistemological intersections and the ways that meaning is made as a result of them. It is my intent only to posit such a platform for this discussion, suggesting possible avenues of inquiry and examining possible ways of

acknowledging these architectonic links in our thinking, not to arrive at a tangible conclusion or to offer any sure path toward understanding or communication. My humble intent is only to suggest my ideas about our ways of looking at things that could offer a ground for the recognition and exchange of many possible ways of thinking and making meaning on a cultural and individual level.

Chapter One will begin to trace the parameters of this platform through the historical use of an architectonic vocabulary and imagery within the discipline of philosophy. The successful sharing of ideas and the building of an argument are entirely dependent upon a foundation of the already familiar for their expression. As in Carver's short story, without a firm grounding, thought can be neither easily conveyed nor expressed. From ancient times (and surely earlier) the Western progression of thought has relied upon an architecturally-structured expression, both in terms of what one might consider to be "high philosophy" all the way down to everyday expressions and metaphors so common they remain unexamined as evidence of the phenomenon. Think only of the lexical items used in both disciplines—structure, foundation, building, shape, ground, form.

This first chapter very briefly traces the architectural lines in philosophy from the ancients to postmodernism, with a nod to the interdisciplinarity of the entire platform, incorporating psychology and history into the equation to

demonstrate the flexibility and wide-ranging applicability of architectural metaphor in thought. Also in this chapter two works of architecture are discussed to offer possible means of opening the discussion using artifacts. The first of these is a Confederate memorial on the campus of the University of Louisville, which introduces the difficulties of historical relevance and memorialization across time, and the second is a purely conceptual work not intended to be brought into physical form, which introduces the emerging facet of architecture as theory and thought more than material form.

Chapter Two begins from this point to address the intricacies of memory and memorialization on the meaning-making process with a heuristic definition of memory. Far from being limited to a discussion of memorial architecture only, this analysis suggests some possibilities for our thought to be restricted and manipulated by our own methods of processing past events, introducing additional problems introduced by recent technologies and popular culture. An examination of attempts at meaning making follows, with a distinction made between elicited and spontaneous memories and the cultural hierarchy we place upon them as a precursor to the final chapter in which two pieces of memorial architecture are discussed in depth and these facets of unreliable and contingent memory are discussed in terms of framing our engagement with processes of monumentation. One thinks here of Saint Augustine's tenth book of *Confessions*

in which he speaks of “vast palaces of memory,” and the descriptions of collecting and storing memories in a contained space. He recognizes the importance of architecture—calling memory a “sanctuary”—and at the same time posits what he calls an eternal memory, for things such as shapes (and Carver’s cathedral), some always- and already-known structure that needs only be accessed by the individual. He suggests that memories are stored as images, forms that are abstracted from the experience or thought into images that the mind can retain, categorize and make available for later recall.

Imagery and memory serve as one bridge between the architectonic and the metaphysical, and this chapter attempts to open up ways in which those processes might be internally unreliable, via a discussion of recent studies in the field of psychology on false memory, and subject to environmental and social influences, using the construct of collective memory, particularly in the ways these influences factor into historical inquiry. If memory is unreliable, the concrete form to which it is tied can possibly provide a counterbalancing source for stability. In this chapter I discuss the use of material—specifically, stone—in the memorializing process and tie that material to an equally solid foundation in philosophy in Aristotle’s four causes: the material, formal, efficient and final. The connection, though easily recognizable, is nonetheless incomplete and remains open for expansion and critique. Using a simple gravestone as an example, the four causes

provide a bridge for a discussion of the intersections of concrete elements and memory. For example, the material cause allows us to examine familiar processes within our experiences of memorialization. An examination of the efficient cause reflects the focus of my project through providing a space for transition from memory to concrete representation and back. Understanding the intent and design of the architects through their own words will allow for the possibility of an open investigation of thought, memory and representation.

Finally, the distinction between monument and memorial is discussed in a similar vein, and though separation of the two can be useful in certain venues, for the purposes of my discussion and platform, the distinction is not a primary focus. This chapter ends with another heuristic definition, this time of a memorial, which at least calls into question the uncertainties of what constitutes memorialization at the same time as providing a working structure for the expansion of the discussion.

Once the heuristic definition of a memorial is presented, I shift the discussion in Chapter Three toward the next step in an analysis of thought and memorialization: metaphor and inscription. It is at this point that the reintroduction of the intersections of architecture and thought in the meaning-making process become somewhat more concrete. After describing the means of



employing metaphor in our engagement with philosophy and our structuring of thought (and in this case not only architectural metaphors, but rather the device in general), a reinvestigation of the definition of memorial is necessary, including in part a consideration of the applicability of the construct of collective trauma. One thinks here of Daniel Libeskind's 1999 Jewish Museum in Berlin, with its shape when viewed from above as a distorted, deconstructed, angular Star of David scraggled along a city block. The multiple cracks in the façade of the structure—what Libeskind calls “voids”—in conjunction with the deconstructed Star present clear metaphorical reference to the traumas of the Holocaust. One need only look at an image of the exterior of the Museum to appreciate what Libeskind is able to express without words, or without a visitor even entering the building. At this point, however, the architectural metaphor becomes insufficient since the visitor *will* enter the building, or at the very least, the observer will know the name of the structure, and be faced with the competing but equal forces of expression through naming (or inscription) and through form alone.

Since the process of inscription or naming is necessarily one of limitation, how this affects memorials and our memories is then introduced, including the nature of what is absent from the inscription or name and in what ways that also serves to provide definition instead of providing room for a more open investigation of meaning-making. From this point it becomes necessary to discuss

the role of a public versus a private memorial. Arguably, every public memorial is simultaneously a private one, but the nature of the individual engagement with the structure is not firmly defined, and the appeal over generations and cultural circumstances is a factor which deserves attention. Though structuring of thought may take place using similar constructs, the avenues toward achieving meaning are infinite and individual. It is here that the relationship between architectonic language and philosophy (at the level of individual thinking about thinking) is particularly beneficial, allowing for the expansion of discussion and reflection and exchange of ideas within parameters that are opened by a recognizable and familiar lexicon and foundations toward a meaning-making process that affords the individual space for the filling in of gaps in the structure.

Chapter Three concludes with an expansion into the virtual world. Just as the Green Machine in Chapter One anticipates a future in which architecture no longer is restricted by physical form, our extensive and pervasive reliance upon virtual imagery urges that the investigation be expanded beyond the concrete. It is here that the platform for discussion may be fully realized since the virtual and the philosophical must still rely upon at least a mental structuring of the concrete in theory, even if the concrete form no longer necessarily exists.

In the final chapter, the analysis shifts to a discussion of two works of memorial architecture, the World War II Memorial and the Holocaust Museum, both of which are located in Washington DC. Following a thick description of each which relates design elements to structural elements within philosophy, here again used both as a discipline and as an individual drive toward examining our own thinking, a brief overview of the tenets of modern and postmodern architectural theory are included as possible bridges between our ability to engage with architecture, translate that engagement into philosophy, and arrive at a space which encompasses the multiplicity of routes toward meaning-making. The difficulty in this section lies in the narrowing and delimitation of what defines modern and especially postmodern architectural theory, but again a heuristic application of the means in which we structure our thoughts forms the basis of my discussion and provides a point from which I examine my own limitations, those of theory, and those of the platform for discussion that I am suggesting.

Using perspectives from disciplines of history, psychology, architectural theory and philosophy, my very limited intentions with this document are to examine the mental links we have historically created between architecture and philosophy, to suggest the extent to which these links are problematic and useful both, and to offer a possible space for the ongoing and always-changing discussion

of the means by which we achieve meaning, individual and cultural, through the framework of architecture. In other words, to draw my own version of a cathedral.

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Locating a middle ground—the search for compromise, for understanding—could this be the function of philosophy, primarily epistemology? Though identification of the middle ground certainly cannot be said to reveal absolute truth, it is traditionally thought to serve as a point of reference for advancement or at least quantification of human thought, a means of appealing to a commonality in human experience. In American history and philosophy, the middle ground is associated with the overlapping of white and Native American cultures (Pratt, 592), in art history the term is used to describe the area of a painting between the foreground and the background, and culturally we speak of the fallacy of the middle ground, which states that a position occupying the space between two extremes must not necessarily be the correct one, though we often assume it is. Even the exposure of this fallacy, however, is not enough to dispel our cultural association of the middle ground as the place where

compromise is reached and commonality recognized, suggesting multiple perspectives achieving some shared point of agreement. It seems that we are continually searching for a place of commonality, of shared reference, of relation between ourselves and the rest of the world, and the formalized results of that search have become philosophy itself. However, philosophy is much more than a reductive process to arrive at a common denominator in human thinking: it is the ongoing *search* for meaning, not necessarily the achievement of it, that is central to thought.

Arguably since ancient times human thought has attempted to describe, categorize and structure itself within a commonly accessible framework, but this framework is itself complicated by the underlying presumption that there is commonality and shared experience altogether. Instead of the middle ground occupying a place of commonality, then, perhaps it can be better said to occupy a place for possibility. It is from this place of uncertainty and indeterminacy that we might examine the historical interdependence of philosophy and architecture, to ask new questions, only ask them without the burden of answering them definitively because of the difficulty of defining our own cultural moment, solving problems or postulating theories. Or as Richard Rorty writes of his own style of pragmatism, “to try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions’.” (9) To

question the possibilities, the assumptions and the roles of the architectonic language of philosophy and the ways memorial architecture are made manifest is the scope of this project, not to answer questions or restructure theories, but only to examine and possibly look toward a restructuring of the way questions about those topics are formed or, to use an architectonic metaphor, to build a platform for an open and ongoing process of questioning—in other words, to search.

As a part of this discussion, it immediately becomes necessary to define my use of “we” and “our,” particularly in terms of thought, and especially in light of the problematic nature of defining the current cultural moment as I see it. We need to know who we are (and who we define as “we”) before we can begin to analyze exactly how this platform for discussion might operate. Who is marginalized, excluded, uncounted within my discussion? Because I am indeed a product of the Western androcentric cultural and intellectual tradition, I readily acknowledge the limitations that my education and history place upon my perspective. That being said, the limitations are not insurmountable, do not have to be exclusionary and can still allow for—no, here I want to say *welcome*—the incorporation of other and Othered perspectives. To be sure, there will likely be those excluded from the “we” I use in this document. Though I am not able to speak for others who are not in the position of academic privilege I enjoy, those who do not have access to fresh and nourishing food, those who do not enjoy

political stability in their country, or those who suffer such acute oppression and injustice that the luxury of thinking epistemologically is literally unthinkable in the struggle for day-to-day survival, I would like to at least allow room in my platform for discussion for their voices to be heard.

This is not to say that I am diminishing the importance of other perspectives and circumstances, rather I am saying just the opposite: that consideration of a multiplicity of perspectives is crucial in the wake of Postmodern and pluralist critique and that we cultural scholars and historians need to arrive at a means of acknowledging the value of other positions while acknowledging that other positions cannot all be equally incorporated or represented adequately. Maria Lugones refers to “differing degrees of coalescence” (Purity, 459), and I think this provides a workable metaphor for the extent to which multiple perspectives can assist in suggesting possibilities for developing thought without being the single or definitive route. My search here is not for a new unity or a resurrected Modernist one, but how we might define this moment and arrive at definitions that must incorporate other perspectives. My contention is that we are still learning how to do that. As Kathleen Lennon writes, paraphrasing Wittgenstein on rules and offering her own assessment, “Agreement in the application of rules is a practice into which we have to be initiated” (247). I feel that perhaps we are



still at a point of drafting the rules for our current cultural moment and that that is part of the ongoing process as well.

Before beginning to discuss the Western interlacing of architecture and philosophy in a formal sense, it is worth noting some of the bases of widely accepted instances of the structuring of Western Modernist and Postmodernist thought, beginning with its architectonic and archaeological expression by Freud, and incorporating a practical process of metahistorical inquiry by Hayden White. Our Twenty-First Century thinking is encapsulated in and informed by both of these processes, and it is from this starting point that my goal of the introduction of a platform for discussion might be initially examined, anticipating the ways in which the remaining chapters of this work allude to the recurring leitmotif of these same factors in the structuring of our thought, in terms of philosophy, memory, metaphor and theory. By introducing the discussion through the disciplines of psychology and history, the philosophical and the architectonic overlap in the demonstration of thinking about thinking. Moving toward the end of the Twentieth Century, challenges to these dominant modes of thinking would arise not only as a result of Postmodernist theory, but also (and perhaps overlapping with it) feminist and pluralist critiques, illuminating the necessity of a more-inclusive, broader base for this platform.

Himself a student of ancient thought, Sigmund Freud would articulate in *Civilization and Its Discontents* a comparison between the archaeology of Rome and the structure of the human psyche, both with multiple layers of varying age and completion, both intentionally and unintentionally constructed and always in a state of revision. Freud writes of the psyche, "These places are now occupied by ruins, but the ruins are not those of the early buildings themselves but of restorations of them in later times after fires and demolitions." (4) <sup>2</sup> Though he goes on to note and respond to the objection to the comparison in cases of trauma or destruction, the analogy nonetheless holds firm in Western culture, particularly when it comes to the issues of memory and representation of those memories, a discussion of which will follow in a later chapter. For now, however, we may make the comparison between this image of structuring of the mind not so much as psyche but instead as philosophical engagement.<sup>3</sup> Though much of psychoanalysis as we have come to understand it describes traumatic events as contributing to the development of the individual psyche, the idea can be

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, Michel Foucault would go on to expansively discuss the relationship between archaeology and the acquisition and possession of knowledge, but, for the sake of brevity, the point is well made for my purposes by Freud's observations alone.

<sup>3</sup> Freud would also offer the Mystic Writing Pad with its traces of what has come before to describe the layering of meaning and experience in some permanent, if not easily consciously accessible, form as well.

expanded with little difficulty to encompass the collective historical traumas experienced by humankind. While the scope of my project does not include a deep engagement with the affective processes of trauma and trauma narratives, the acknowledgement of the undeniable influence of trauma upon our human philosophical development in a historical sense—in other words, that progress always inherently involves the partial destruction and rebuilding of former structures, of the psyche, of the memory or of concrete form—is central to my line of discussion. Only through a re-structuring of our thought can progress, learning or understanding be achieved.

Additionally, Freud provides us with a view of civilization as being restrictive to the human and exploitative of nature, stating that “...a country has attained a high level of civilization when we find that everything in it that can be helpful in exploiting the earth for man’s benefit and in protecting him against nature.” (15) Here Freud positions civilization and nature at odds, a positioning which deserves mention within the discussion of the intersecting realms of philosophy and architecture and the effect that situating has upon our thought. Philosophy, if conceptualized as a desire for introspection rather than a formalized discipline, in this sense may be analogous to nature, while architecture could be seen to represent the “civilizing” influence or the framework for the utilitarian maximization (or in Freud’s terms, exploitation) of the natural. Each is dependent

upon the other for its expression and development, perhaps even its existence. It is this level of engagement with philosophy — the human desire for introspection — that I will continue to use throughout this document.

Though in the Western tradition we tend to privilege thoughts considerably more than the forms of their expression (though this claim may not apply within the creative arts), without structure and without civilization, humans would be adrift in an existence that is unquantifiable and unremarkable. By unremarkable, here we might consider the word as a hyphenated un-remark-able, in the sense that marking of existence through art, literature, philosophy and language is the means by which humans become engaged in and document and analyze their own life experiences. Architecture and the conceptual imagery it elicits from us, the structure, could be the root force that allows the creation of platform for human existence to discuss itself as remarkable. The natural to humans, though Freud may have disagreed, is arguably their desire to mark — and to remark upon — their experiences through meaning-making processes, and this can only be made possible through a universal human system of structured communicative channels: a language, a lexicon, and a platform for the expression of thought.

Half a century later, Hayden White would expand upon this structuring in a discussion of metahistory, a practical (if unsettling at the time) examination of

history as subject to the processes of human narrative expression, and dependent upon the structuring of human thought at least as much as on the “truth” of the event itself. When one considers a personal encounter with a piece of memorial architecture, White’s distinction between the competing forces of a “lived present” and a “mythic past” (Burden, 133) certainly are recognizable as components of our individual meaning-making processes and interpretive impulses. Though early on it could be argued that White focused more heavily on interpretation than inquiry, in any case the development of historicism over the past forty years has certainly included a recognition of the necessity of challenging those interpretations as well, bringing with it a point of view not dissimilar to Freud’s on civilization<sup>4</sup>. Thought cannot be expressed without structure, just as history cannot be discussed without its own historical framework. In a 2005 article, A. Dirk Moses describes White’s contention that “... the problem with humanistic realism is its dependence on hierarchy and domination” (318), a problem that is not for my purposes linked to White’s Marxism, but rather is indicative of the improbability of achieving any definitive meaning outside of a multiplicity of historical, cultural and individual contexts. In some sense, it is a problem more political than philosophical, since hierarchy and domination are implicit in any structuring of

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<sup>4</sup> Somehow this idea ends up as eternally generative—even the website [metahistory.org](http://metahistory.org) discusses the four stages of metahistory since its inception. We are always looking for meaning.

thought or development of ideas—elements must be selected or rejected, arguments tightened and conclusions achieved—but meaning is possible in infinite scope and is driven by the multiplicity of contexts. In another sense, it is no problem at all.

It has been noted that Hayden White feels that the work of the historical profession lies within the realm of meaning rather than knowledge because it is written for a particular group or purpose (Moses, 319), clearly supporting the idea that thought—about history or any event or, I might argue, any thought—is always a platform for inquiry rather than a firm location of fact and event. As early as 1966 he would state in “The Burden of History” that the intellectual value of the discipline increases in the Twentieth Century because it focuses on the similarities of art and science rather than their differences (113). Similarly, my discussion will only strive to point out but a very small number of the countless ways that meaning can be made across and within disciplines, cultures and individuals, all with a similar architectonic structuring of thought, and each with an individual point of view and outcome, all of which arrive at a version of truth

and none of which are to be considered less significant forms of meaning-making.

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This suggestion of betweenness, a literary foundation, and the multiple perspectives of the historical process will be vital to my discussion of metaphor and metonymy in engaging with memorial architecture. For now, however, my project may be summarized as an attempt at a reinterpretation of Hayden White's interpretation of a metaphor for the historical account: "a heuristic rule which self-consciously eliminates certain kinds of data from consideration as evidence" (Burden, 130). Not unlike the processes of assimilation and accommodation described by Jean Piaget, a heuristic, a metaphor, even an equivocation that is my thesis allows for a continual reworking of thought and inquiry into our already-present Western structuring of thought while at the same time encouraging—no, urging—an openness to the consideration of new perspectives to allow the architecture of the mind, the schema, to be dismantled, shaken up, altered and rebuilt. This last facet, rebuilding, will be shown to lie at the essence of the consideration of our current cultural and intellectual position. This accommodation is no different than the metaphor posed by Hayden White,

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<sup>5</sup> In this same essay, White discusses the "historical imagination" and our resistance to it. I think this comment is still spot-on 45 years later, despite our alleged progress, and in fact I think it might be extended to "intellectual imagination" in general. We are still so afraid.

Freud's analogy of the psyche and the city of Rome, and the instances of rupture suggested by Baudrillard.

If we begin from this point—the point from which a new examination consists of, is bound by and simultaneously is freed by the previous examinations of modern scholars—the evidence suggested by psychologists, historians, philosophers, and theorists points in a similar direction. Across disciplines the idea is continually presented, whether through analogy, metaphor, cultural history or postmodern theory, but in none of these cases is the most simple, foundational idea of thought bound by structure developed and interrogated, or even presented as subject to questioning at all. The foundation and structuring of thought is accepted as given, and it is my only intention to begin an examination of this cultural given in its own right, ultimately analyzing to what degree Modern and Postmodern theory are able to allow for the situating of our current intellectual position in a larger framework using architecture as a concrete means of employing the theory.

As Wigley describes, philosophy and architecture may historically be said to have a “fatal attraction” for each other (19). One is not possible without the other, yet each seems to endeavor to undermine the foundations of the other at the same time as using the other to define itself. The interconnectivity of the two



disciplines, including philosophy's reluctant acceptance of the role of architecture as contributor to its own existence, becomes crucial to the study of either. This factor is central to the development of my thesis since in architecture, arguably more so than in other disciplines, the role of philosophy is more a matter of necessity than optional influence. The intersection of the two disciplines (or I should say intersections in the plural, since the overlap is a complex intermixture of crossing points hardly distinguishable as singular nodes, though they all are hinged upon one commonality) provides a solid ground for exploration of the processes of our own ways of being and thinking. One result of this process, however, is that the result is not transformative and does not generate thought, or even much notice, for most people who view it. This absence of meaning-making must also be considered as one point of view (if a troubling one) in a consideration of memorial architecture and incorporated into our self-analysis. This "paradox of ignorance," as Jose Medina discusses in *The Epistemology of Resistance* (146), is exemplified by the following example from the University of Louisville campus: how, in the presence of so much available information, can observers remain ignorant of their own cultural and historical background (even, in this case, when it is such localized history)?

On a traffic island between Second and Third Streets adjacent to the campus of the University of Louisville stands a Confederate Monument dedicated to the

fallen Confederate soldiers of Kentucky. The subject of occasional controversy, first as an impediment to the free flow of traffic in the 1920s and 1940s then as a potentially politically incorrect if not overtly offensive symbol of intolerance, the monument, long-term property of the city of Louisville, has nonetheless remained in its original location since 1895. The monument consists of two life-sized bronze statues elevated on a series of four stairs and a 70-foot pedestal topped with another slightly larger-than-life statue of an infantryman. Thousands of students walk by this structure every day, with few ever stopping to observe it, ponder its purpose or read its inscriptions.<sup>6</sup> Only occasionally and in mild form has protest against the monument been raised over the past century. We all walk past it, it is barely noticed. Often students are surprised to learn the purpose of the monument, they go on to respond to the news with indifference or opposition, but rarely do they demonstrate evidence of introspective engagement with the structure itself, its meaning or its history. When discussing the monument as part of ongoing class discussions about racism, many of my students have commented that they feel it has no relevance to them or to their viewpoints in current times and remains purely a historical artifact situated in its era.

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<sup>6</sup> The inscriptions read “Our Confederate Dead 1861-1865” and “Tribute to the rank and file armies of the south by the Kentucky Women’s Confederate Monument Association” with the two opposing sides inscribed with simply “C.S.A.”

As the University of Louisville continued to become more diversity-conscious in the early 2000's, a commission was formed to fund and develop a park with the goal of memorializing the loosely-termed "struggle for freedom" in antebellum Kentucky. This struggle included such elements as retelling the story of Kentucky during the Civil War, documenting the Civil Rights movement in Kentucky, and healing Louisville's divisions along racial and class lines (Master Plan, 1). This park would include at one corner of the property the Confederate Memorial remaining in its traditional location and unaltered in form. To reduce or counteract the negative associations with the Confederacy and to offer a balance with the symbol of Southern sentimentalism, Freedom Park was completed as designed in 2008 with the intention of telling the story of slavery and the struggle for civil rights within the Louisville area. Encompassing the historic Playhouse and most of a city block, Freedom Park now stands as what might be considered a counter-monument, one which arguably receives as little direct attention six years after its completion as its predecessor by a century, despite the lofty goals of the commission to educate the public and provide a place for thought to be generated. Though the design is quite striking and the purpose entirely positive,

rarely is anyone caught in the act of stopping to notice it either.<sup>7</sup> Almost an attempt to “undo” the memorializing purpose of Confederate Monument, Freedom Park exists as a rehabilitative effort for past injustices, but at the same time it sets up its own position of irrelevance as well. Many of my students view Freedom Park’s objective to be achieved and the historical issue resolved—it offers a counter-perspective to the Confederacy, offers multiple avenues of engaging with the “struggle for freedom,” and is serving the expectations of a diverse city and university population—but the ongoing purpose of the memorialization process seems from their perspective to be static and completed.

One difficulty with the discussion of the multiple purposes, manifestations and meaning-making processes of monumentation and memorialization is at its essence tied to the question Jacques Derrida posed in an interview with Peter Eisenman: “What is of this place? What is to think there?” In the case of Louisville’s Freedom Park and Confederate Monument, according to the statements of many of my students, the thinking has already been completed for the observer. This admittedly short-sighted and dismissive viewpoint is one with which we must struggle in terms of opening up a dialogue for discussion of the

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<sup>7</sup> Also in 2008 the row of fraternity and sorority houses across from the Belknap Campus underwent a change of name from Confederate Place to Unity Place. That name change at least receives some recognition in Greek organizations.

current cultural moment. Discounting processes of what Medina calls meta-blindness, an insensitivity to insensitivity (149), or what I might call willful ignorance, is a significant obstacle in arriving at a serious and well-considered viewpoint of inclusion. Perhaps the paradox of ignorance he discusses is noticeable in starker relief in our current technologically-driven society. Here again I think of my undergraduate students who Google everything, glance at the “answer,” and never pause to think about it. From their perspective, they are anything but meta-blind since they are “aware” of the presence of all sorts of – Americans, the LGBT community, issues of race and gender, and so on<sup>88</sup>. They do not often interrogate their own “awareness” (and here again Medina has a name for the process: thesis of cognitive minimums) of either themselves or of others. The title, the name, the grouping is sufficient, but in that way is also restrictive and harmful. What I intend to do in this project is to expand the search for ways of introducing the relevance of the discussion of this historical moment culturally, and as a part of this, necessarily acknowledge the presence of a multiplicity of viewpoints.

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<sup>88</sup> Let me say here that my students are mostly wonderful people who, when pressed on the issue of their own lack of investigative drive, will so often respond positively and enthusiastically. Here I am with Medina that the problem lies with our cultural failure to point out the necessity and value of overcoming our meta-blindness.

Perhaps there is a further point to be presented here regarding what Medina terms the “*ignoramus*”: I would agree that in large part the responsibility for lapses in cultural knowledge of other perspectives does lie beyond the individual, but we each participate in the ongoing exclusion of other perspectives by failing to investigate them more thoughtfully, to identify the underlying assumptions and cultural presuppositions under which we operate, and to attempt to reformulate our own positions in light of that investigation. Even left acknowledged at the level of “awareness” (rather than a considered examination) however, other perspectives at least have begun to enter into our cultural consciousness on some level. Perhaps though still partial and largely uninvestigated in dominant cultural thought, the presence and influence of perspectives from the margins can no longer be suppressed.

Since this process of already-having-been-thought-through, dangerous as it is to be left uninterrogated, is arguably true of all things that have been named anyway (what function a monument or memorial serves that separates it from other objects will be discussed in a later chapter, as will the process of naming and renaming), how might a discussion of objects, and certainly ideas, be approached beyond their concrete and self-contained named forms? What is to be thought in a specific place is no small part dependent upon the existence of place itself, and the structure of the thought that develops is dependent upon the restrictions and

limitations of the place it occupies, and the future directions of thought always threatened by looming irrelevance. Though within a single framework any number of possibilities for interpretation and thought may arise, the communication and transmission of those thoughts depends upon the framework to support them. From thinking and structure to idea and implementation, the possibility emerges that philosophy and architecture are mutually dependent for their expression.

In order to investigate the significance of architecture beyond the purely aesthetic, we must first recognize that the language of philosophy is grounded (structured, built, constructed, founded) on architectural imagery as is even the language of discussing the language of philosophy. An architectonic lexicon has always been necessary for philosophy to describe itself as a discipline: the idea of ‘grounding’ or ‘foundation’ in philosophy has been employed since the ancients and has transitioned into the Modern era with Descartes, become solidified in Kant, then redeveloped by Heidegger, and interrogated by Derrida. The historical basis of thought has necessarily described itself as being built upon a firm foundation of logic—the metaphor of philosophical inquiry and the construction of an edifice seem only natural when describing a progression of thought. As Wigley states in *The Architecture of Deconstruction*, “Metaphysics is no more than an attempt to locate the ground. Its history is that of a succession of different

names (*logos, ratio, arche*, and so on) for the ground" (7). The quest for a suitable means of describing and taking hold of the ground, then, could be a primary function of philosophy in no small part because of philosophy's own definition of itself.

If we, then, examine the ground as contingent by nature, not contingent upon any one thing or other in specific ways but rather always simply contingent on something, we are reminded of Badiou's assertion that every object ... "is inexorably marked by the fact that in appearing in this world it could have also not appeared and, moreover, it may appear in another world." (321) From this position of recognized contingency, though, we can still meaningfully develop a series of observations and interrogations of the notions of ground, particularly in the intersections of the architectonic language of philosophy and architecture itself. From this intersection then will follow a critical examination of the structure and function of memorial architecture.

To trace the development and use of architectural language and imagery in philosophical expression, we may begin with the very reduced and simplified Aristotelian perception of metaphysics as a search for an answer to the question "what is substance". From this most bare form and definition can the immediate presence of possibility and contingency in meaning be recognized. While the



answer to this question "what is..." necessarily anticipates the making of a statement on truths and epistemology, the purpose of this investigation is not to arrive at a means of accessing absolute truths, or even identifying the presence of contingent truths, nor is it to critique means of arriving at knowledge. Rather, what follows is only the most modest attempt to ponder the means by which our very thinking about thinking is dependent upon architecture, how that thinking is influenced by metaphor and memory, and how those elements combine into a process of meaning-making. The outcome(s) of that process is/are less a matter of focus than the process itself.

To begin thinking about thinking and our ability to structure thought, in other words, the intersection of philosophy and architecture, we might acknowledge that, as with all language, the terms we choose both express and delimit the structure of our thinking, leaving some part of the meaning always at least partially inaccessible. *Episteme* is to be found in common English usage in the word epistemology, of course, the study of acquisition of knowledge or the distinction between opinion and justified belief. Michel Foucault would in the Twentieth Century describe *episteme* as a means of separating statements into those which it is possible at a given time to identify as true or false (Power, 197), a description which reflects the instability and relativistic nature of what we consider to be knowledge based in science or the scientific method. *Techne*, though

likened the term to craft or practice instead of theory, nonetheless includes within it an implicit inclusion under the broader scope of knowledge in general rather than the solely artistic or creative. In modern English usage, however, we tend to revert back to the dichotomous distinction between theory and practice in our thinking about intellectual pursuits<sup>9</sup> and, perhaps because we do not have a proper word for it, fail to question ourselves as to what might be located in that middle ground. In this current document, I am as guilty as anyone in keeping theory and practice dichotomously separated, but the entire work is suggesting possible ways of recognizing and approaching that middle ground.

Though the medieval scholastic period would see the development of metaphysical thought in terms of logic and semantics (in all its luxurious laboriousness) paralleled by the construction of magnificent structures in the Gothic style, scholastic philosophy itself depended heavily upon the influence of the Church and of a religious underpinning. In short, the view was that humans were created by and grounded in the perfect being of God, and all human creation and thought resulted from and was devoted to this Creator. For the purposes of

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<sup>9</sup> I might offer up as evidence the distinction within the Humanities PhD program between dissertations that are more traditional and research-based (Culture, Criticism, and Contemporary Thought) and those which center on an artistic product (Public Arts and Letters). I would like mine to be able to occupy a place between the two.

the discussion of the architectonic language of philosophy and the intersection of the two disciplines, it seems best to exclude the element of religion and the bases of scholasticism at present, as they do not further the discussion as presented and would encompass an entirely separate investigation of theory (belief) and practice (works).

Rejecting the prevailing Scholastic claim that knowledge is primarily achieved through sensation as well as attempting to dispense with the resulting proofs and arguments that became only more complicated over the centuries, Descartes privileged the ability of the mind to access truth through clear, precise geometrical theorems and through its own ability to doubt. Though he differs from the Aristotelian-Scholastic idea that substantial forms exist and result in specific kinds of things, he still contends that there is an extended thing, a body, matter (*Principles* II:1) and goes on to delineate the parameters of how we might determine what makes something able to be classified as itself. When one considers this in an architectonic sense, the dependence Descartes places upon the three dimensions is actually little varied from the ancient tradition—the solidity of the object, or the ground, is not questioned even when subject to his process of radical doubt. The difference lies in his developing the new, stable, undoubtable ground of the mind, at least to his thinking.

In Part II of the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes provides an example from architecture as a parallel to the way that one matures in one's own capacity to reason, stating that, though the most appealing buildings and towns are those of a single architect or a single plan, uniformly organized, structured and designed, one would never destroy already-present buildings in an effort to achieve uniformity in a city. In a similar way, one cannot help but employ and build further around one's own previous knowledge and around the canon of knowledge altogether rather than destroying the existing foundations of one's personal knowledge and start afresh<sup>10</sup>. However, he does discuss the human achievement of reason over time as equivalent to a resurfacing or restructuring, even an occasional destruction and rebuilding, of buildings that already exist when it comes to the individual and his attainment of knowledge and reason over time. Ideas, like buildings, can be dismantled and rebuilt, can take different shape and meaning, but their placement on the ground will remain unchanged.

Though Descartes may be interpreted to have razed ancient philosophy to the ground and to have rebuilt a new method of structuring thought in its place, in his writings the presence and stability of the ground, however, remain unquestioned

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<sup>10</sup> In this way, I think Descartes anticipates some Heideggerian ideas about existence being a precondition of thinking about existence, only in terms of knowledge and the thinking about knowledge.

(in a process similar to that mentioned by Wigley above in the Postmodern period). Throughout the *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes speaks of “grounds for doubt” and “grounds for certitude” without ever doubting the presence of ground itself. Again, he removes all knowledge based in the material world and in sensation, until he is left with the only undoubtable structure, the thinking self—but of course now the “I” becomes its own ground. Even in his architectural metaphor he suggests a rebuilding if a foundation is not solid or an alternate structure inhabited during the rebuilding process, but he does not question the existence of ground as either a concept or a word.

If the ancient and Cartesian edifices were the cornerstones of the architectonic language of philosophy, their connection was firmly solidified by Kant’s erecting of supporting walls around them. Though Kant found architecture to be the most inferior of the arts (tellingly, because of its very utility), he certainly availed himself nonetheless of its imagery and terminology to construct and develop his own thought. Even the title of his work *The Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* reflects this presupposition of a place or space upon which his argument for the development of reason can be built. Just as in the work’s first chapter he argues that moral law is more or less the codification of a series of morally “good” decisions that a person makes intuitively, it could be argued that his, and all of philosophy’s, use of architectonic metaphor to construct rational arguments is

similarly a form of the legitimizing of what is an intuitive process of thinking about thinking arrived at independently within the human experience. After stating his postulation on the categorical imperative that one should conduct himself as if the maxim were to be a universal law, Kant writes, "...here it is mere lawfulness in general (without grounding it on any law determining certain actions) that serves the will as its principle..." (*Grounding*, Ak 4:402, 18). The suggestions of contingency and possibility are already evident in the form of even the most basic acknowledgement of specificity of context or action as something that he rules out in his recognition of the general nature of morality (or of the ground).

Of course, Kant's abstract stance would later come under criticism, particularly by Hegel, because it does not account for variation among cultures or societies, however, this aspect of Kant's position in *Grounding* illuminates an important premise in both his argument and its critique: whether there is a societal difference in determining the moral good or not, the presence of a moral good—whatever form it may assume—is not in question, and it serves as the basis upon which the rational examination of reason and morality is begun.<sup>11</sup> In the same way, the

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<sup>11</sup> This reminds me of the discovery of a 32-foot section of a ship dating from 1773 in the foundation of the former World Trade Center in New York City. While excavating for an underground parking structure, workers found the ship's hull 22 feet below ground level, used as part of the foundation for previous buildings. The necessity of a foundation is unchanging, but the acceptable forms it assumes vary across time.

structural dependence of philosophy to ground itself in architectural language for its very expression is itself unquestioned, though the manifestations and interpretations vary widely.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant stresses the necessity for the creation of a stable philosophical edifice and firm ground on which inquiry can take place. He views the state of metaphysics as a discipline at that time to be in ruins and uses such images as clearing or preparing the ground for the establishment of a new metaphysical structure altogether. This language, however, contains an inherent acceptance of not only the durability of the structuring of thought but also, and most importantly, the tacit presupposition of the existence of a firm ground itself upon which every thought can be built, every edifice constructed, every structure made solid. Clearing the ground reaffirms and necessitates the presence of the ground itself. His discussion of an a priori human knowledge of mathematics, for example, relates directly to the intersection of architecture and philosophy and to his discussion of the construct of space within the human experience. That space (and with it, time) is an intuitive construct in Kant's reasoning suggests that its applicability to my assessment is not to determine what the parameters of real objects are or to try to explain how that type of knowledge might exist outside of the faculties of our own minds, but rather to turn the focus of philosophical thought toward an examination of the way humans think about their own thinking

minds. In other words, the actuality of the ground is immaterial, if you will, but the conceptualization of that ground in the human mind is the foundation upon which philosophy rests. Here I would interject that I by no means intend to focus on or even suggest that there can be the identification of a particular ground or a unified foundation. Rather I hope to discuss the continual process of seeking and relying upon foundations (multiple, contingent and always in a state of revision) to discuss our thought.

Some scholars suggest that the significance of Kantian views on aesthetics, beauty and utility were pivotal in the progression of the philosophy of architecture and in fact present a line of demarcation in the way that the “purpose” of architecture was envisioned. Paul Guyer suggests that while the Vitruvian conceptualization of architecture prior to Kant emphasized both beauty and utility, post-Kantian thinkers used his Critiques to shift the perception of architecture toward a more cognitive form of art which would express abstract ideas (7). This would anticipate high Modernism’s views on the role of architecture, illustrating the transcendent role of a structure in human experience and the use of material and design to allow for a full development of social, ethical and intellectual experience, but this was not to take shape for almost another two centuries. Certainly Kant’s position was nowhere near the Modernist view in



terms of abstraction of ideas and theory, but it did introduce a new abstraction and complexity in the philosophy of architecture nonetheless.

Though he would not remove utility from the equation and make the aesthetic judgment of it purely abstract, he did discuss architecture as merely<sup>12</sup> exhibiting the idea of adherent beauty which he describes as, "... the beauty of a building (such as a church, a palace, an arsenal, or a summer-house) presupposes a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be," and that "... one would be able to add much to a building that would be pleasing in the intuition of it if only it were not supposed to be a church." (Kant, *CPJ*, §16, 5:230.) In this statement, he delineates the very presuppositions about architecture that are always holding it back at the same time they are defining it—in other words, we cannot think about thinking about architecture without including the thoughts both that it must function and that it must always exist to some degree outside our intuitive engagement with it. In a later chapter we will return to this discussion both in terms of the definition of a memorial, in that one must always allow for some extra-intuitive element of presupposition as a factor of the experience that restricts and predefines one's realm of engagement with the object, as well as in terms of how Modern and Postmodern theories allow for expression of this idea.

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<sup>12</sup> Kant uses the descriptor "merely" as a qualifier when he uses the term adherent beauty in regards to architecture in the paragraph from which the direct citations were taken. I find this significant.

John Whiteman, architect and Director of the Chicago Institute of Architecture and Urbanism, wrote about this difficulty of engagement between people and objects, stating: "I believe that we find ourselves at a distance from our objects, and that it continually occurs to us to try to cure this distance as if it were an illness. Instead I see the skeptical distance between person and thing as an unavoidable and difficult, even if not a natural, state of affairs; and I regard the task of architecture merely to repeat this situation quietly, weakly, and unmelodramatically ..." (Skepticism, 43) Rather than treating (if not curing) the distance as a disease, he suggests that we recognize and accept this skeptical relationship between a person and architecture (or the entire world), an almost Kantian view of the discipline as being restricted by both its purpose and our expectations of it. Whiteman then discusses the expression "against a wall" as simultaneously connoting leaning on the wall for support but also having no means of escape in doing so. This phrase and the metaphorical image it presents illustrate the rigidity, complexity, and paradox of even a person's most basic engagement with a structure and, in turn, with the expression of thought.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A distinction between the philosophy of architecture and architectural theory most certainly exists, but that distinction occupies a position outside the scope of this chapter. The hope of this chapter is only to search for generality through discussing philosophy and architecture as disciplines and their points of intersection. An outline of architectural theory will occur in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Martin Heidegger would later rearticulate connections between architecture and philosophy by expanding the intersection and interdependence of their domains while at the same time opening a new avenue for our thinking about thinking and about our experience with structures. In his 1954 essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” he begins with a discussion of the interrelatedness of the very words “to build” (*bauen*) and forms of “to be” (such as in the German *ich bin* and Old English *beon*), suggesting that prior to its modern definition of “to build,” *bauen* had been more expressly linked to a sense of dwelling. In other words, that to dwell (*wohnen* in German<sup>14</sup>) in our current use signifies only one of many daily activities that a human does, in fact, an unproductive one and one done in a specific location. In earlier connotations of *bauen*, however, Heidegger points out that a person does not just dwell in a location but exist in the human sphere (be) and, very importantly, that *bauen* in earlier forms connoted both an element of cultivation (as of the soil, which is evidenced by the modern German word for a farmer: *Bauer*) and an element of edification.

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<sup>14</sup> In this same essay, Heidegger continues with his etymological analysis with the word “wohnen” (to reside, dwell or inhabit) to similar effect, linking the word to a being at peace in a space. I felt that “bauen,” however, was better suited to my discussion.

Heidegger goes on to explain that we do not dwell because we are builders, rather we build because we are dwellers (350), a statement which rearranges the usual relationship between a person and a structure: it could be suggested that what the structure does for us in terms of aesthetics, utility or theory is almost immaterial, those are not the essential elements of a human engagement with architecture at all, but rather that we as humans, as dwellers, are the ultimate contingent and dependent objects of a discipline we created—we needed to create architecture because we needed to dwell, but now we are subjected to and defined by the very thing we needed to create. He asks, “What is a built thing?” and goes on to articulate an example that, “a bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream” (354). We only create the bridge because we dwell, we exist, and part of the existing is the physical need of crossing a stream. In order to fulfill that human need, however, to keep our existence intact, we have at the same time handed over the power of place to that bridge. The place was not there until a bridge was needed, Heidegger contends. Once we determined the need and built the structure, we allow the structure to assume the work of designating “place,” and in this way, we may be by necessity building our own irrelevance into the structure. As soon as a structure (or in Heidegger’s famous example of a jug in discussion of a Thing) achieves its form and becomes independent, *selbständig*, it lives up to a direct translation of the German: self-standing. Even without

entering into a discussion of etymology, applying the lexical item to a structure reveals that the structure, as soon as it has reached completion, is self-standing, it has become independent of us as its creators and exists outside of (and perhaps despite) our relationship with it, circumscribes our sense of place and geography, and has made us dependent upon it for at least a partial engagement with our own sense of being.

In terms of my own inquiry into the intersections of philosophy and architecture, Heidegger's essay served as a catalyst in my contemplating in the realm of philosophy what we are willing to accept as given or stable and what we are willing to surrender to products of the human hand. Though certainly this is not the first instance of a philosopher arguing that point, it seems clear that Heidegger's articulation of the idea can be interpreted to almost devalue the "head" from the person and while situating the person as a being in a physical space of his own creation. This multidirectional relationship between the person and the structure, the comingled interdependence of the two elements of our thinking and our dwelling, is a constant of all human experience, even if that factor goes largely unexamined because it is thought to be too obvious or mundane. By concentrating on the phenomenological experience of *being* before anything else, suggesting a more vigorous interpretation of "to be" as a verb of action, Heidegger nudges at our post-Enlightenment tendency to first absorb meaning and relevance

through the mind by instead taking pains to situate our bodies on the earth (and under the sky), in other words, to remind us first that we exist.<sup>15</sup>

In short, Heidegger's works can be said to present a central question in relationship to Being: on what does it stand? His process of *kritischer Abbau* (directly translated as 'critical unbuilding' or less expressively, 'deconstruction') incorporates both his recognition of the shortcomings of traditional metaphysics and his vision of a new direction for the discipline of philosophy. He suggests that a first crucial step is to cause the foundations of metaphysics to totter through the process of unbuilding. The difficulties with Heidegger's aspirations, however, are that in order to critique one's susceptibility to one's own language, one must employ the language that makes us susceptible to it, and, as mentioned earlier, in order to think about being, one must first inhabit a state of being. Even the term *Abbau* reflects the architectonic structuring of thought as well as the tacit acknowledgements that in order to deconstruct something, it must have been built (and already be *selbständig*) in the first place, and that the place where it stands has

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Scharr presents a down-to-earth discussion of this idea in *Heidegger for Architects* (27) by stating that one difficulty with philosophy is the conundrum that one must already exist to think about being and existence. In the same way I have always thought that one must have the luxury of a place to dwell before one can think about being or existence or even dwelling.

been solidified in the process. Though the foundations have been (and should be) shaken, the ground underneath remains stable.

Heidegger conducts his examination in reverse chronological order as he critiques Western philosophy using *Abbau*, which he describes as “a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are de-constructed down to the sources from which they are drawn” (*Basic*, 22). In other words, he is using not only language to critique itself, but philosophy to perform its own self-examination and self-criticism as well. At its very essence, then, one might come to view philosophy as a continual history of its own construction, a history which had long been due for a critical examination, but a history which finds itself bound to, limited by and dependent upon the very language and processes that have made its expression and development possible at all.

Jacques Derrida would expand upon both the difficulties of language and the problems of the potential structuring of what may reluctantly or uncomfortably be called a “method” of deconstruction and develop these difficulties into another version of philosophical inquiry into its own discipline. Derrida embraces the Heideggerian concept of causing the foundations of a metaphysical structure to totter and expands upon the metaphor using the Latin

term *sollicitare*<sup>16</sup> “to shake as a whole, to make tremble entirely” (Wigley, 35) or “to disturb, shake up” (latindictionary.net). By not only destabilizing but un-resting (in the sense of *beunruhigen*), Derrida incorporates the entirety of the structure of metaphysics, not just its foundations, into a disturbing of the peace.<sup>17</sup>

Once the peace has been disturbed and the un-resting begun, we might concede that though a foundation must always exist, it is never stable, and that only through this instability is the constant re-creation of the edifice of philosophy permitted and future directions of thought made possible. When critical analysis exposes cracks in the existing structures, metaphysics must immediately and continually rebuild and refortify itself, only to have the resulting critical analysis expose new cracks. Derrida encapsulates this idea when he describes that structure of metaphysics is, “erected by its very ruin, held up by what never stops eating away at its foundation” (“Fors,” xxiii). Much like the space between the self and the self as other in the mirror, as metaphysics continually investigates itself both as itself and as itself being studied, the space between the two leads to a constant

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<sup>16</sup> The German equivalent of *sollicitare* is *beunruhigen*, which directly translated means to un-rest or to disquiet, an antonym for which is *beruhigen*, to calm or to ease.

<sup>17</sup> The phrase “disturbing the peace” has been in my mind because of Heidegger’s discussion of the verb *wohnen* (to dwell), which he traces through its Germanic root to a modern word for “peace.” I find it so engaging that he does the same thing with words that he does with the history of philosophy that at times I find it difficult to leave these little things unmentioned.



and necessary sense of tension and instability. Similarly, architecture is in a continual state of standing and being understood, allowing for the same instability and fluidity. It is arguably through the instability that possibility arises and the multiplicity of meanings has space to be constructed, but this process is complicated by the parameters of the physical presence of the structure in a way that is peculiar to architecture among the arts. This undeniable presence of the physical uniquely positions architecture as a means to analyze the effectiveness of these processes of thought and meaning-making.

In an interview entitled “A ‘Madness’ Must Watch Over Thinking,” Derrida states that: “... as soon as there is language, generality has entered the scene and the idiom compromises with something that is not idiomatic: with a common language, concepts, laws, general norms” (*Interviews*, 339). The commonality stands as the very precursor to possibility and variability of meaning. Rather than a restrictive zone of compromise, then, perhaps the middle ground can be reinterpreted as a freeing space for the cohabitation of any number of conflicting views, united by one common element, whatever that may be. Only because they are tethered to the general then can the potential for the flourishing of meaning-making, interpretation and possibility exist. From this position one may, as Lorraine Code says of the epistemologist, begin to “...devise ways of positioning and repositioning herself within the structures she analyzes...” (*What Can She*

*Know*, 70). Recognizing the structure in its general form—a middle ground of sorts, always limited though it is—allows for movement from a narrowed perspective to a more inclusive one and a positioning that allows for constant re-evaluation and re-development of that perspective in light of ongoing self-investigation and cultural critique.

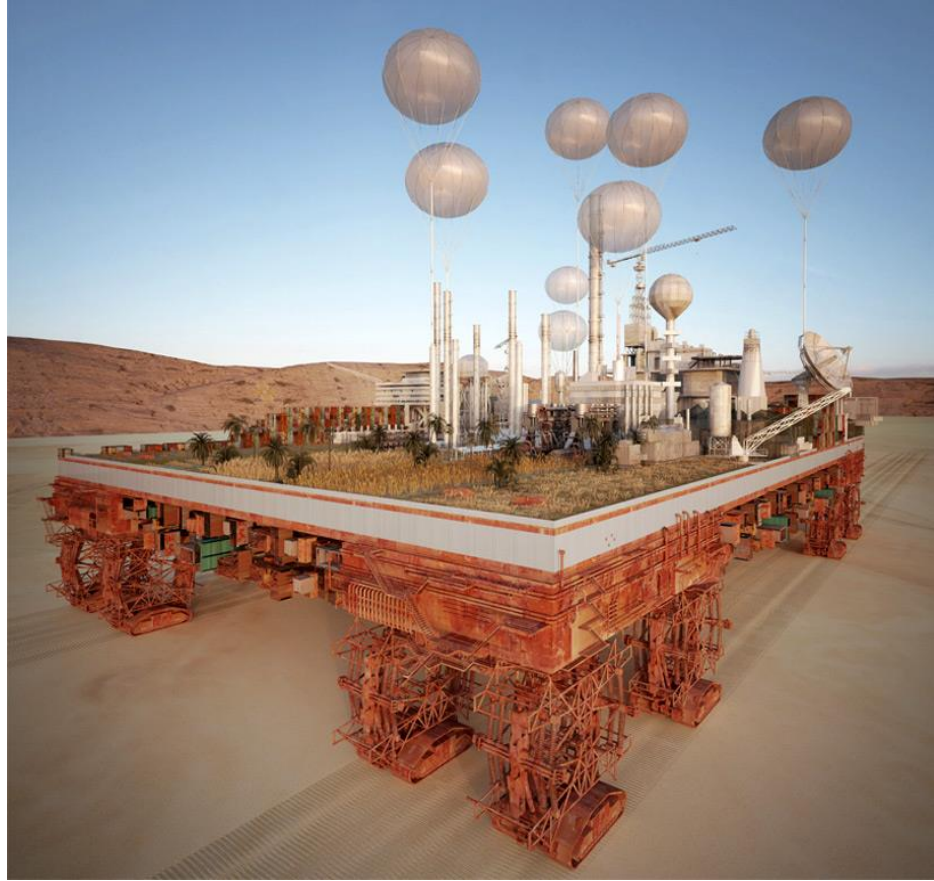
Once the foundations of our thinking about architecture have been exposed to the critique of Postmodernism and pluralist perspectives—our assumptions have been shaken, the forms have been deconstructed and the ground has at least been acknowledged to be simultaneously destroying and regenerating itself—where is there left to go? Since structures once built do not depend upon people to inhabit them, and since they become their own *selbständig* entities which we then use to define place for us, the new and possibly interesting questions could arguably take shape without depending on a structure to ground them in the physical world.

Science fiction writer Bruce Sterling has been credited with having coined the term “architecture fiction” in 2006, a strange, futuristic, conceptual marriage of imagination, design, and eco-consciousness oftentimes reminiscent of the hopeful transcendent certainty of high Modernist architectural theory. Though architecture fiction can also take the form a convoluted, neo-sci-fi style of writing

adopted by a very specific virtual community, more interestingly the term is used to describe the creation of conceptual models that use structural design to describe a vision in the way a writer would use words. To be sure, architects have always designed models with the intent of producing a structure or representing a potentiality for a structure, but whether or not these models were ultimately transformed into physical form or discarded on the drawing table, they inhabited a step along the way towards the production of a structure. The difference with the models of architecture fiction, however, is that they are intended only to be conceptual, never to achieve physical form. In that way, and in perhaps a possible new way “forward” following the critique of Postmodernism, they—the things, the objects around which so much of philosophy has always centered itself—remain in the realm of “fiction” while still allowing our theoretical engagement with architecture to evolve. Perhaps architecture can only develop after postmodernism without the physical structure to confine it, without the burden of the interaction with the person, no longer assigned and assuming the task of defining place for us. As a thought experiment, the notion is valuable, but architecture it is not.

The Green Machine, a concept by a French group, Malka architects, arrived on the virtual landscape in March 2014. The vision of a self-contained industrial city on a mobile platform, it is conceptualized (in theory only) to regenerate

vegetation and restore the water balance to an arid region, then to move itself along the desert to rehabilitate another area of land. The images are quite stunning, complete with water-gathering balloons appearing suitable as props for any steampunk film, legs that appear half-scaffolding, half-Tinkertoy ending in tank-like caterpillar treads refurbished from NASA rocket transporters. Created only as “architecture fiction,” the Green Machine is intended to spark conversation about the increasing problem of global climate change and diminishing resources rather than to be placed under construction or to take on the task of land reclamation in actuality. Envisioned in the Sahara desert, the structure would contain an entire industrial city, complete with schools, housing, production facilities and recreational areas, all of which would exist so that inhabitants could further the goals of planting seeds, irrigating the land, and producing what the architects speculate would be 20 million tons of crops each year. Once an area had become an arable farming space, the Green Machine would roll on through the desert only to stop and rehabilitate another arid landscape into workable, productive land.



Even if a possible way for thinking about architecture to move forward is in the realm of the unconstructed — after decades of being deconstructed — the path nonetheless is reminiscent of the search for a radical change in urban planning in late 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Modernism as well, only one which cannot come to physical fruition. Not unlike the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, architectural fiction focuses on not only design and aesthetics but also equally on functionality and purpose, only updated by a century and with a shift in primary focus from the individual human experience to the global environmental one. Imagining the City Beautiful design, one need only consider the Mall in

Washington DC, the quintessential arrangement of civic structures with public space, or even the arrangement of Frederick Law Olmstead's parks in Louisville. One goal of the City Beautiful movement was to arrange structures with regular open spaces that allowed the free procession of humans between them, and this impulse is reflected in architectural fiction as well, only on a much larger scale. In the case of the Green Machine, the "architecture" itself is designed to move and to have some agency in affecting change, despite and only because of the fact that the model is never meant to be brought into being. It is by design speculative and theoretical, not intended to achieve physical form, always both bound by and free to move within the realm of imagination. It is from this very recent development within the disciplines of science fiction and urban planning that the historical role of architecture in thought might be freshly examined for its future direction. To be clear, it is by no means the future of architecture as it is not architecture at all, but it may be used for the theoretical construct of the arrangement of thought in the imagination.

The model, whether a blueprint or a virtual image, has always occupied a position between possibility and actuality, between thought and representation. While architecture fiction intentionally sets itself apart from the discourses of theory and design, in all other forms of architecture including the most basic modes of construction, a model necessarily exists in a liminal position between

vision and implementation, a bridge of a million cables linking idea and representation. However, the model is not an object firm in its definition or form, it instead represents possibilities and a multiplicity of eventual outcomes. The model stands as a bridge between the conceptual and the actual, but it itself encompasses much more than either of the two. It encompasses possibility. It is from this point of the architectural model, of the position of neither-nor and both-and, that a critical interrogation of the future directions of the intersections of philosophy and architecture might be undertaken. Perhaps architecture fiction serves as a catalyst for a critical reexamination of the middle ground—or we may begin to consider it as the middle space—that has served as a function of our metaphysical engagement with thinking and being.<sup>18</sup>

The Green Machine is architecture that is neither structure nor theory exactly but rather represents only and entirely possibility. The story it tells, the fiction in the architecture, is that of the architecture itself, never intended to assume physical form, it is only a construct of the mind. Unlike actual structures, architectural fiction can and does tell a story—but that is all it does. Though

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<sup>18</sup> I realize this entire segment is pure speculation, but following in the etymological footsteps of Heidegger, I might point out that the Latin form *speculare* “to observe,” or “to view” is also a modern Italian term for the noun “mirror” or “mirror image.” Without speculation we can neither see ourselves nor move forward, and architecture fiction (as well as my discussion of it) is purely speculative in the most optimistic sense of the word.

architects have always created models or plans or blueprints as precursors to the actual structures they would build or design, what should the model be called when it is never meant to be brought to physical being? The possibility of a design, of a structure, rather than the structure itself? The architectural plan or model is the product, in the way that words on paper are the product, and architectural fiction now places the discipline into the virtual rather than the concrete. It is then difficult to tie the determinedly ephemeral into anything beyond speculation or fiction, to speak of theory and structure, but it is here that the role of the model in architecture fiction reveals itself as intriguing to our continuing processes of thinking and being.



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**“Memory is the architecture of our identity.” -- Kevin Townsend<sup>19</sup>**

In order to discuss the materials of memorial architecture in any meaningful way, or in fact to enter into any discussion of memorialization at all, the need for a heuristic definition of memory becomes quickly apparent. Though the definition of what constitutes memory has been continually questioned and redefined in most disciplines of social science, common elements, all problematic unto themselves, include: that it is distinguishable from the present, that it can be

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<sup>19</sup> Kevin Townsend is a Boston-based artist and educator whose works are driven by representations of memory. I emailed him asking for his permission to use this quote from an interview he had given, and he agreed to allow me to make use of it as I wished. He said I could credit it however I chose, since his thinking was strongly informed by Deleuze and Bergson on the matter. I thought crediting him was the best solution since he was the one who said it exactly that way.

expressed or shared with others, that it can be triggered without our conscious control and that it is a form of knowledge. Scientifically it is often likened to a filing system or a method of encoding information for later retrieval. All of these elements, while certainly true to varying degrees, leave vast gaps in the definition. Some of those gaps I will attempt to bridge by addressing considerations for my discussion of memorial architecture: image and representation (including time), psychological factors (including false memories) and the collective versus individual experience of memory. For the purposes of this discussion and with the goal of arriving at a heuristic definition of memorialization as well, memory could be defined as: a sometimes voluntary and always unreliable means for an individual, bound by his position in and as a product of his social and cultural situation, to engage mentally with past events which may or may not have occurred. This definition is informed by the examination of a historical engagement with memory in the Western tradition and is by no means definitive, original or authoritative. It is only intended to serve as a working term for the duration of this discussion, all the while remaining a point from which continual questioning may be allowed and even encouraged.

To any definition of memory, a consideration of imagery—or the materials of memory—is crucial, as is the acknowledgement of temporal positioning. Arguments attempting to counter the positioning of memory as anything but

referring to a past time would be spurious for the purposes of this study, but the possibility of a reinterpretation of time and volition in memory in the current technologically-driven world is worth some consideration. Since memory and its representation have always been linked in a fundamental way — Aristotle uses the term “presentation,” Bergson writes of representation and imagery, Ricoeur of the tendency toward “overly representing” certain historical events—in an age of virtual imagery, the problem of memory and the most representative form of its artifact becomes all the more perplexing. If memory since ancient times has been thought of as temporally separated from the present and viewed in retrospect, what then can we say of the modern catchphrase “Making Memories”? The term can be found from every episode of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* to the caption for a Friday-night Instagram barcrawl selfie, and, while it is annoying in its smugness, it is nonetheless captivating in its willful marking of the significance of an (often otherwise insignificant) moment in the present as elevated to the status of “event” when viewed as past in a future moment. This phrase reveals us catching ourselves in the significance of a present act from a future time and in so doing reveals and captures the present as the future’s past.

In a technologically-centered world of instant images, simulacra, and first-person virtual “experiences”, perhaps the term memory is falling into the position of becoming relevant primarily as a managed attempt to keep pace with the

breakneck pace of technological development and access to information. Whether the nature of memory depends on the form of experience, the conscious cognitive engagement with a moment, or the performative speech taken to elevate that moment to a memory, what is taken into account and named as a memory necessarily must now evolve in the context of our dependence on technology as a mediator for engagement with life. Our traditional views on memory are fading as we superimpose our technologically-generated products upon experience.

In her essay, "The Place of Memory," Suzanne Küchler makes a case for differentiating memory into *mneme* and *memoria*. She asserts that *mneme* is remembering a previous experience by chance while *memoria* is a conscious process of recalling an experience, stating that "things of the mental world have a necessary correspondence to things belonging to the moral and temporal world."

(54) To a degree, Küchler reinforces the cultural notion that somehow unsolicited memories are more valid or "count" more because they appear to come out of nowhere, while memories tied to things are much more easily accessed and are thereby less valuable. Though both terms are translated into English as "memory," the root of *memoria* appears most often in our cultural discourse, and though the differentiation between the terms as offered by Küchler may not be optimal overall, for the purposes of a discussion of memorial architecture the distinction is at least useful to acknowledge as a possible trajectory for thought.

When engaging with a memorial, one is subject to the already-ongoing discourse of history and cultural experience surrounding the event and in so being is called upon to consciously “recollect” an event that is likely outside their realm of individual past experience. In other words, a memorial is always designed to provide at least part of the memory for the observer.

A Google image search of the term “making memories” reveals faux-antique plaques and photographs, as well as well-organized craft bins and carousels of scissors, ribbons, and various accoutrements of scrapbooking. To make a memory, to knowingly preserve a moment, to construct a model or graphic representation of that memory, all of these assumptions underlie what has somehow, in popular culture, become the slogan of the possible reinterpretation of memory-making into a hands-on craft project. Popular culture would have one believe that memories are specific and volitional and can assume the shape of concrete things, in other words, that memory is under our conscious control and can be adequately represented by an intentional “product” in an active process of creation of future experiences of *memoria*. This intentionality of the present act of memorialization that always eludes the present reminds one of Badiou’s comment that, “[T]he event is always what has just happened, what will happen, but never what is happening. The event is a synthesis of past and future.” (382)

We set out to make the memories, execute the planned action, document the result, and identify then resolidify the moment as a memory in the retelling. It is almost as if the element of the past is being removed from memory and being supplanted with a temporally-loose structuring of the present, or at least recognizing the present (or even the future, as in: "Let's go make some memories!") action that will knowingly be interpreted as the past at a later time. Memories are made (concrete) by cutting and pasting chosen images, artifacts and words into an aesthetically-pleasing final product. A manufactured memory is perhaps becoming the newest legitimized form of memory in a post-industrial, technology-obsessed, documentation-hungry society. It seems that at least in popular culture we are moving toward a trend of the substitution of memory with external imagery or, somewhat more generously, a fusion of the two, leaving unexamined, unanswered and almost irrelevant the question of what actually constitutes or defines memory outside of the artifact that bears the descriptor.

That question, of course, has been a documented part of the analysis of human thought since the ancients, and the idea of imagery has been linked to memory throughout, however what has changed is the nature and scope of those images. In the Modern era with the rise of photography, film and now virtual imagery, a shift has occurred from an internal recollection of an image toward an

external representation of an image as the primary source of memory<sup>20</sup>. When considering the question from a philosophical perspective, we still employ traces of the ideas from the ancients that memory is a work in progress, one under our control, that is formed by the accumulation of images or ideas synthesized temporally into something we call our memory. Plato likened the process (and product) to a wax tablet upon which impressions were made, focusing on the impression or image more than the functioning of memory itself (*Theaetetus*, 191). Socrates is often quoted in popular culture for disparaging writing as a force that weakens memory, while Aristotle distinguished between retentive (as the lesser) and recollective (as the superior) forms of memory (*On Memory*, I), all of which allude to an individual possession or ownership of one's memory. In the briefest summation, then, the ancients might be described as viewing memory as something that achieves its highest form through the refining of internal dialogue and critical engagement with a subject.

Through art and logic in the Medieval Period and Renaissance and quantification and categorization during and since the Enlightenment, the forms

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<sup>20</sup> To be sure, elements of external imagery have always been linked to memory and memorializing—one thinks of cave paintings as testaments to memorializing hunting successes—but my claim here is that in the post-industrial technological world, we have begun more and more to supplant internal memory with external image.

or materials of memory appear to have changed little, though the intellectual positioning of memory in human experience would take new avenues. In the Medieval Period, engagement with a text was seen as a process of consuming and digesting (terms we still use today when describing an in-depth reading) with the memory taking the metaphorical form of the stomach instead of the mind.<sup>21</sup> Though this is only in reference to memory in terms of texts, the visceral metaphor of digestion is quite intriguing to describe the process of consumption and ownership. During the Enlightenment, scholars would offer multiple forms of categorization and structuring of memory in ever more complicated schemata, while in the post-Enlightenment period, we have made no great progress in the capture of memory as an intellectual or metaphysical construct beyond these.

Certainly during the Twentieth Century, the role of memory underwent radical interrogation, the impact of which will be discussed later in terms of memorialization, but the fundamental structuring of the elements of memory themselves exhibited little variation. To be sure, other more complex versions of personal memory presented themselves as a result of the inhumanity of the Twentieth Century, such as the disrupted narratives and lack of hope for

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<sup>21</sup> For a captivating read on this, and on the position of memory in the Medieval Period in general, Mary Carruthers' *The Book of Memory* is a winner.



resolution and closure of which Lawrence Langer speaks in *Holocaust Testimonies*. In that work, he suggests that Holocaust survivors often exhibit processes of memory that he describes as anguished, humiliated, and tainted, though I might add that these facets of personal engagement with memory could be extended to include survivors of other traumas. Though I do not address trauma narratives specifically in this work, their impact on our ways of thinking cannot be discounted, however, I will abbreviate my discussion to the parameters of our more limited processes of engagement with memory. During the Twentieth Century, the study of memory, in an arguably neo-Enlightenment drive to classify and categorize, flowered in the discipline of cognitive psychology, with one primary area of scholarship in recent years taking the form of studies in false memories. Since memory itself is difficult to define, its processes still remain largely mysterious, and its reliability continually and openly presented as marginal at best, the phenomenon of false memories complicates the quantifiability of memory even further, and at the same time lends itself more comfortably to the purposes of this discussion of meaning-making and memorialization.

Leading toward a questioning of the purposes of memorial architecture, the subcategory of false memory is particularly applicable since it necessarily factors into engagement with the historical process external to us as individuals. If, in the

expression of our thought, we depend upon structures of generalization, memory might be thought of as performing a similar function in our engagement with events and the historical process altogether. It could be argued that generalization necessarily includes an element of falsification or, less cynically, *compromise* with other perspectives in order to arrive at some commonality of experience or thought that can be retold as a historical narrative. Whether or to what degree this process is volitional is a matter of debate, but recent studies suggest that the generation and acceptance of false memories occurs at least in part independently of outside factors.

Nearly two decades ago, researchers posited a fuzzy trace theory of memory which argued that the process was composed of two types of traces: verbatim traces as a memory of the surface form of events and gist traces as involving associations and relationships in the memory process. In a 2002 article, Brainerd and Reyna discussed the parallel storage but dissociated retrieval of verbatim and gist memories based on their finding from 1995 that reasoning accuracy was largely independent of memory accuracy. Not surprisingly, one could fail to retrieve the details of an event (verbatim) but could easily access information when it was able to be related to other structures (gist). Though it makes sense to even the casual observer that gist memories are more stable than verbatim ones, in the later study Brainerd and Reyna found that false memories

were more persistent than true ones when events in the false memories had better retrieval cues for gist memories if those in the true memories were based on verbatim traces (167). In other words, when they are easily retrievable as being associated with other events, false memories will endure longer than true memories which are based on more specific actual cues. This finding was indeed surprising, since the truth of an event was shown to be a less important factor than the manner in which the individual encoded and stored the information.

Another recent study on false memory concluded that even when subjects actually performed actions (rather than just witnessing them), they nonetheless made consistent errors by “remembering” their performance of parts of a task when they had not performed those actions at all. This was the case even when alternative versions of the event were not presented to them, suggesting that false memories are created not only through outside influences but also have a tendency to arise from within the individual. As Foster states of the study: “... doing something does not confer immunity from false memories; even in the absence of suggestion, people can falsely remember having done things they simply have not done” (231).

Cognitive psychology, then, demonstrates the tendency of an individual’s memory to blur the lines between what is actually remembered, what is suggested,

and what is fabricated, resulting in a generalized internal account of an event which is neither specifically individual nor specifically collective.<sup>22</sup> Episodic or phenomenological memory is difficult to isolate to an individual experience of memory, since almost all events are in some way influenced by other people or versions of the event, even, it could be argued, in the retelling or documentation of the event. Even the anticipated sharing of a memory—and even the memory of an event that never happened—in some way removes an entirely individual ownership of it. Here one is reminded of the Oliver Sacks example of recollecting the intrigue surrounding an unexploded bomb in his backyard only to find out that his “memory” of the situation came entirely from letters his brother sent to him while he was away at boarding school. In this way, I might suggest that the ways in which memory translates into “knowledge” is subject to the same processes of uncertainty and outside influence. The blurring of lines can extend beyond memory (of a past event) to the continual re-working of understanding (in the present), and in that way can become a valuable process in the continual redefinition of one’s cultural and personal knowledge, including the knowledge of another person. As Lorraine Code explains, claims of knowing a person are

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<sup>22</sup> Jerome Dokic describes this as “Goethe’s problem”—the philosophical difficulty in describing, much less explaining, the gap between episodic (here, he means phenomenological) and factual memory—stemming from a comment Goethe makes in his autobiography about confusing what others tell us about childhood memories with what we genuinely know from personal experience of the event.

“open to negotiation between ‘knower’ and ‘known’” (What Can She Know, 39), in a way that is suggestive of a continual re-evaluation of a relationship based on shared experience and some level of intimate understanding. While this relationship does not have to be based on a dynamic of power or control, it does however suggest a fluidity of role in that process of negotiation between two people or, perhaps less dynamically, between a person and an object. The memory develops along with the relationship and the mutual knowing.

This is very different from “collective memory,” however. That term, originally credited to Maurice Halbwachs<sup>23</sup>, refers to memory shared by more than one member of a specific group. Studies in psychology have revealed inherent problems of collective memory, among them what Basden et al term collaborative inhibition, noting that “the frequency of false recall increased when group members were perceived to have mentioned events that never happened.” (221). Certainly the idea of outside influence on individual memory is nothing new, we commonly use terms like “groupthink” or “social loafing” to describe it, but in many ways collective memory is difficult to distinguish from what has been traditionally thought of as history. One must not necessarily have participated in

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<sup>23</sup> I cannot let this go unmentioned on the grounds of fun (and likely false) etymology: Though Halbwachs himself was French, in German “Halb” means “half” and “wachs” could come from either the verb “wachsen” (to grow) or the adjective “wach” (awake).

an event to be eligible for participation in the collective memory and the ongoing discourse about that event. Kathleen Lennon discusses the limitations of our understanding as always partial and our subsequent judgments and justifications as always based on those limitations. She suggests that the consideration of other points of view results in an impact on our own point of view in a process of recognition that “other perspectives can make sense” (255). In this light, the boundaries of an engagement with a historical event through collective memory can expand to more easily include the perspective of someone who did not experience it. However, as I will discuss in a later chapter, this process does not mean that the engagement of an observer is analogous to or demonstrative of the same type of engagement of someone who directly experienced an event, only that it is a different kind of “memory” that is accessible through the distance of a collective cultural history. Understanding that another perspective “makes sense” does not, of course, translate to a complete understanding of that perspective, it only means that the other perspective is worth consideration in an effort to expand the parameters of one’s own positioning and participation in the structures of collective memory. In many ways, this is the best we can hope to do.

When collective memory enters into a discussion of memorial architecture, then, its limitations as described by psychologists may supplant parts of the individual memory of a person who actually experienced the event and

circumscribe a pre-packaged “memory” for someone who did not, though we have seen that these are also processes that “make sense” in the development of our perspective of an event. The concept of collective memory must necessarily be incorporated into the process of memorializing, oftentimes as a legitimizing structure from which the oppressed might make their voices heard, and while this is certainly a necessary function, the interrogation of it may become almost proscribed because of an appearance of insensitivity. Though we acknowledge the inherent unreliability of individual memory, we culturally stand much more firmly behind the ostensibly verifiable collective memory of an event rather than discuss its own susceptibilities to falsification, unreliability, and interpersonal factors or the processes of group dynamics. Culturally speaking, collective memory is not only used to justify history, it is itself doing the telling of history.

This calls to mind a quote by Herodotus about the job of the historian: “Very few things happen at the right time, and the rest do not happen at all: the conscientious historian will correct these defects.”<sup>24</sup> If an individual is conceptualized as having a repository of experiences from which memory is drawn, the storage, coding and retrieval of these experiences, as is borne out by

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<sup>24</sup> I use this quote in my Cultures of America and 20<sup>th</sup> Century History classes, and it does not sit well at first with undergrads who think that history is “real” and factual.

the psychological studies in false memory, is susceptible to the subjective responses of the individual himself. The extension of this individual subjectivity to all members of a group participating in the discourse of collective memory immediately reveals the spiraling processes of “correction of defects,” “social loafing” and the errors in acceptance or rejection of false memories blur any accuracy in describing the event.<sup>25</sup> I think the phrasing of collective memory, as with individual memory, is best served by the acknowledgement and inclusion of an aspect of negotiation—both within the individual himself, to account for variances in coding and retrieval and for external influences, and within the realm of the collective social group, to account for individual influences and the processes discussed in the discipline of psychology. Gadamer’s position as summarized by Kathleen Lennon is worth nothing here: in terms of the functions of our own prejudices, we might consider them as openings for further understanding to enter our ways of thinking rather than closed-off boxes keeping new perspectives out (255). Knowing the limitations of our individual perspective can urge us to be open to incorporating other perspectives into our own.

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<sup>25</sup> Please do not think I am asserting that absolute truth exists in anything. I just cannot find a more suitable way to phrase it.



In *History, Memory, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur describes collective memory as an ongoing construct that involves the telling and retelling of an event. An individual is inserted into this ongoing narrative at the time of his birth, and the narrative serves as a lens through which individual memory is experienced throughout his life. Ricoeur does acknowledge the problematic nature of the retelling of an event based on the unreliability of the individual and the shortcomings of collective memory, but asserts that historiography nonetheless can be said to be truthful or accurate as a version of an event as it is told and as it applies to a group, while it always remains open to revision. For the purposes of my discussion, Ricoeur's thoughts, as briefly as I have condensed them, reflect a solid point of departure for a questioning of the meanings in memorial architecture. While memory may not be completely reliable, in order to make any statement, one must recognize its shortcomings but at the same time rely upon the process of historiography to illuminate a particular version of truth. At least this negotiation provides some level of acknowledgement of the accuracy of the details an event while still providing room for the ongoing act of necessary and continual revision of that event.

I recognize that the difficulty with defining memory—either or both individual and collective—is immense and fraught with limitations, pitfalls and inconsistencies and that my discussion, like all the others, has not been able to

bring clarity to the overall very human situation. For the further purposes of this discussion, however, the limited heuristic definition of memory at the beginning of this chapter will have to suffice, informed by philosophy and psychology both but nonetheless profoundly incomplete as it is.

Even beginning from such a problematic definition of memory and discussion of its history in the West, one recognizes the ongoing human endeavor to transform memory, whatever its definition may be, into some concrete form. Though the process is familiar, the use of the word “concrete” raises new questions in terms of the object, image and representation of memory. Since a memory is itself contained in and confined by a mental space, it arguably cannot achieve the status of an object in the material world as such. To have a memory connotes the claiming of possession of an intangible mental structure, to share a memory involves communicating it through some form of language, but to transform a memory into a material object (or to transfer it onto one) takes the process into even more uncertain territory.

It is at this intersection between a memory and memorialization that we might look back to the ancients as a descriptive starting point. Aristotle posited the idea of production and the four causes, which might give some insight into the bridge between idea and material form and our conceptualization of the meanings

of memorial architecture. The four causes, then, might serve as a possible frame for the introduction of what we consider to be memorial architecture, using the most basic individual grave marker for a more straightforward example of the scope and limitations of any discussion of this transition between memory and its concrete form. One should keep in mind that Aristotle felt that not everything achieves final representation as an excellent example of its form, and it is from that standpoint of considering what constitutes excellent memorial architecture that allows for an interrogation of the two structures in my final chapter.

A significant facet of the intended work of memorial architecture is indicated through the materials chosen for the structure itself. Though in other cultures memorials are often constructed using perishable items found in the natural world, in the West, the material of choice has traditionally been stone, a substance associated with endurance, strength and permanence. Some recent public monuments, however, are constructed of concrete, a temporally vulnerable man-made material hinting at uniformity, or a combination of materials ostensibly chosen to evoke a range of responses. In a later chapter will follow detailed descriptions and analysis of materials and structural design of The World War II Memorial and The Holocaust Museum, both located in Washington DC, and the intended (and perhaps unintentional) effects of these choices and designs upon the memorialization process for the observer as well.

To be sure, the choice of stone as the material for monumentation and endurance begins well before ancient Greece and Rome, but it is from Greece and Rome that we in the West likely achieve our primary associations with the material. From the Grecian Herm's roots as participatory monumentation of sorts to the employment of travertine in roads and structures of ancient Rome we can trace the development of an association between material and purpose that alludes to permanence in more than simply a religious sphere. Much stone statuary and representative sculpture was created in a memorializing capacity, but it is worth acknowledging the uses of stone outside of a decorative or religious function to bring the civil, public facet of monumentation into the discussion as well. The use of stone to memorialize is surely linked to the material's durability, certainly not its convenience or cost, as a nod to the eternal. This association can be discussed outside the human desire to connect with the divine through the memorialization process, and the scope of this discussion is limited to only the ways the human drive to remember and commemorate manifest themselves in material form.

To return then to Aristotle's four causes in this process, we might first consider the material cause, the stuff from which a thing is made. Though this could traditionally be interpreted as the most easily identifiable and understandable of all of the causes, the definitive and decisive nature of the selection of materials for the purposes of my discussion, particularly in terms of

what we can consider a “material” that comprises a memorial, suggests a need for further analysis. For now, it is enough consider that, as stated above, most individual grave markers in the West are made of stone—granite, preferably, or some other hard stone that resists weathering and maintains its physical integrity over time—to allude to the enduring nature of the memory of the deceased. The assumption is surely that the material choice of stone will evoke a feeling of the presence of the eternal, perhaps even a sense of the afterlife, in the observer. One considerable difficulty in allying stone too closely with an idea of the enduring nature of memory, however, is that as we see from psychology, memory is anything but stable and permanent and always remains susceptible to processes of falsification, loss and outside influence. Perhaps the solidity of stone grave markers could be said to provide some counter-mechanism to the shortcomings of memory, but the attempts to undertake this process may be doomed to failure by the very shortcomings they are trying to counterbalance. The choice of materials represents the truest, most basic human conundrum of ascribing concrete form to amorphous memory, and the process reminds us bluntly and immediately of the impossibility of seeing the essence or the truth of a thing—or even the thing itself—beyond our interpretation of it.

Aside from a discussion of the arrival at a shape and its applicability to memory which will be undertaken later in this chapter, when one considers the

standard grave marker, at its most basic and familiar, the relative dimensions of it are not easily or directly translatable to the human form. How then did we arrive at the common Western gravestone's shape and size? The casket itself is little changed over centuries—it must always accommodate a human body of whatever dimension, and its form is dictated to a large degree by the physical nature of its task. Here one is reminded of Kant's view of architecture as the most inferior of the arts because of its inherent utility, and we see how relatively little casket structure is incorporated into academic writing compared with monuments or memorials. So though the grave marker is freer in its physical dimensions, nonetheless it takes shape as one of the familiar forms of a (sometimes rounded) rectangle, a mausoleum, or an obelisk and still maintains its role as the conductor or narrower of the memory of an individual. Worth consideration, of course, is the assumption that the grave marker triggers memory in the observer altogether. Ultimately it may be more accurate to say that it triggers meaning(s), but that those meanings are not always to be described as memories. Regarding the representation of a memory, then, one must question whether the idea of the shape it will take in materials or the account which describes its taking shape can ever possibly be sufficient to encapsulate a memory. In other words, what is it in the grave marker that reflects the human capacity for memorializing.

It is here that we might consider Aristotle's efficient cause in application to memorial architecture. While Aristotle references examples such as the person who makes a decision or the person who gives advice, there is also included an element of this cause which is not human and which references more than the direct acts of a human. More than an identification of the person who did something, the efficient cause indicates the necessity of looking at memorial architecture (or any event or object) as more than simply a plan put into execution by an agent; it urges us to consider something much larger about the art of memorializing through architecture. For the purposes of my discussion of memorial architecture, we ought to consider the efficient cause—our knowledge of and experience with it, the ways that it is made manifest and the methods used to make it manifest that reflect the ways in which it functions—in order to interrogate what it is about the art of (creating) memorial architecture that can end with its being qualified as excellent. The space allowed for indeterminacy and fluidity in the transition from memory to memorial architecture and will be explored in more detail to follow. Keeping with the example of the simple Western grave marker, however, we might view the efficient cause as the intersection among the human agent who carves the stone—or in modern times, the human agent who operates the machine that carves the stone—the artistic basis for the craftsmanship of a grave marker, the tradition and patterning of the idea of grave-

marking, and the history of the process of memorializing a deceased individual. Is that part ok??

Aristotle's four causes suggest that some things may not achieve the definitive or most excellent manifestation of their kind, and as a result, for the purposes of this discussion of memorial architecture, ample space is created for the questioning of what the form of memorial architecture might be, expanding on the Aristotelian idea of form. The common individual grave marker alludes to this process of open questioning at a most basic level—when observing it, one may recall memories of the deceased person if they were acquainted with them, ponder the life circumstances of the deceased if they did not know them, perhaps situate the timeline of the deceased person's life in history, or thousands of other unpredictable individual responses based on the similarities of individual human experience. The form (or substance) of memorial architecture, may turn out to be the ever-changing interpretations of the structure, the multiplicity of available meanings, and the continual questioning and reinvestigation of its evolving and indeterminate presence outside of the teleological examination of its form.

When we consider these ideas in relation to memorial architecture, of course, the first step is to ask what is the substance of memorial architecture? In order to begin to even consider what the point is, we have to examine the elements



with the eventual goal of arriving at a heuristic (again, admittedly incomplete and imperfect) definition of what a memorial is, what distinguishes it from a monument (and whether or under what circumstances that distinction is even significant), and from that standpoint, what then might be considered memorial architecture—and what might be an excellent example of it—before beginning to examine what its meanings may be and how we might arrive at them.

In *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, James E. Young describes monuments as celebratory markers of triumphs and heroes while defining memorials as commemorating past deaths or tragic events by providing places to mourn (3). Within his definition seems to flow an undercurrent of a binary of representation, either a triumph or a tragedy, and a neat categorization of events into the dichotomous structure. Though his essay deals specifically with issues of Holocaust memorials, the distinction is worth noting because of the difficulty in the defining the terms, even by an expert in the field. In my final chapter will be discussed the potential meanings and especially the meaning-making process of the World War II memorial, which by Young's definition could be both a monument and a memorial, and the Holocaust Memorial Museum, which may not even entirely fit into his definition of a memorial at all, though its very title includes the word. The process of defining a memorial and then contrasting it with a monument is clearly complex, but the reduction of the

description into only two choices limits the manner in which we might engage with, understand and study memorial architecture. If anything, the definition should be expanded, not contracted.

To this end, Michael Rowlands offers a stepwise process between monument and memorial in his essay “Remembering to Forget: Sublimation as Sacrifice in War,” but in so doing tacitly assumes that the monument necessarily precedes the memorial and that a memorial must, conversely, have begun (though perhaps merely conceptually) as a monument. “Monuments become memorials when they: 1) acknowledge the importance of the death and destruction that constituted the sacrificial act, 2) transformation of a sense of collective loss into an object of devotion and passion, 3) deification of the dead through this process of devotion.” (144) Many of his terms—such as “sacrificial act” and “collective loss,” even “object”—are troublesome in application to my discussion, as they assume that the art/history<sup>26</sup> of the memorial is an outgrowth of a process of monumentation first. The process of growing a memorial from a former monument is not particularly useful to my analysis, as the distinction between the two seems to hinge upon the nature of the event (or memory) rather than the

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<sup>26</sup> Although the effective cause makes a lot of sense to me, I am hesitant to only use the word “art” or “craft” in describing the process Aristotle references. To me, inclusion of the co-descriptor “history” makes the image and idea fit more comfortably into my discussion.

nature of its expression. Additionally those same terms do not fit comfortably in my discussion because of the presuppositions of trauma, heroism, sacrifice and noble cause, all of which are questionable in their unexamined sub-context of rightness of action and nobility of purpose.

That a memorial (or even, I might suggest, a monument) is commonly considered to perform actions—to acknowledge, transform and deify, as Rowlands sees them—however, is of vital importance and suggests, though perhaps he might disagree, another indicator of the need for an expansion of the definition of a memorial (or memorial architecture) rather than a narrowing of it. To what extent a memorial can ultimately have a version of agency is certainly debatable, and this issue will be addressed in the following chapter, but for the moment it is enough to recognize that any “agency” a memorial has can be traced back to the choices of human agents. It is an agency transferred by a person onto an object. Nonetheless, the idea of the transformative experience does seem to inform much of our cultural thought about encounters with memorial architecture. When a visitor describes an experience as powerful, life-changing or eye-opening<sup>27</sup>, he has surrendered some of his agency to the memorial in the mere

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<sup>27</sup> These words are ones my Honors students in Humanities offered in describing their visits to the Holocaust Museum.

description of his psychological reaction to it. Of course, as discussed, the element of the psychological and collective memory is notoriously tricky, but it does illuminate the underlying cultural assumption that successful memorials are designed with the expectation that they will somehow act upon us. As Adrian Parr writes in his work *Deleuze and Memorial Culture*, “Maybe, then, memorial culture is utopian thinking: one where culture inhabits this disruptive dimension of traumatic memories, which also entails a little bit of forgetting, while simultaneously bringing forth a sense of agency.” (3) Again here is the tacit assumption that a memorial refers back to a past trauma, and, though I do not find that I am necessarily comfortable making that statement overall, for the purposes of this discussion with its limited examination of only two artifacts of memorial architecture, some element of trauma prior to the memorialization process will be assumed as part of a working definition. The crucial element of the assumption of a memorial’s agency (and its intersection of the agency of the observer) must more clearly be described and will be examined in the following chapter on the role of metaphor and inscription in memorialization.

Before that, however, we must return to the initial question of what exactly can be considered a memorial. My heuristic definition of a memorial for the purposes of the current work, informed by history, philosophy and architecture is: a tangible or intangible placeholder for an event; a location or artifact

purposefully identified to facilitate the gathering of thought and memory, which is always at least both a result of and generative of cultural expectations and experiences. This limited description contains no overt reference to trauma since it is acknowledged in the choice of my artifacts, but it does spotlight the shared intersections of possibilities for meaning-making among the memorial, the individual and culture itself, as this is the most significant avenue for inquiry and examination. Though a memorial cannot have agency exactly (or agency that was not transferred from its human designer), the focusing of the multiplicity of meanings and interpretations within and around it does indeed grant it some form of influence over the possibility and scope of observers' meanings and the fluidity and flexibility of those meanings over time.

The first element of my heuristic definition—that of memorials as placeholders for past events—is strongly informed by the point James E. Young raises about them in terms of his work with the Holocaust memorial: the inherent impossibility of engaging directly with the event by means of engaging with the memorial. He writes, ““They [visitors] have come to Dachau, after all, to ‘see what it was like.’ Being told that this is not what Dachau was like, but only what its memorial is like, may leave some visitors bewildered as to why they have come at all.” (70) Further interrogating the idea of visitors coming to “see what it was like” is the pivotal element in his comment when it comes to informing my thinking

about the topic. Even the making of an analogy, the choice of the phrase “what it was like” belies the feeling of the visitors he describes. If visitors arrive with a hope to see what Dachau was like, a sense of bewilderment and even disappointment should be expected (even by the visitors themselves), since a memorial cannot ever be the event or even the replication of an event. A memorial to Dachau will always be a comparison to Dachau, a type of simulacrum. Even if a survivor of Dachau returned to visit, the memorial would never be “what it was like.” If one visits a memorial, one knowingly places oneself in the current placeholder for a past event and, I would argue, does not arrive at any real sense of the past event beyond the (admittedly large) range of possibilities for the meaning of the memorial, but one does arrive at a changed individual perspective because of those possibilities. Here, in a process akin to what Jose Medina terms a “knowledge of social contextuality” that encompasses both self-knowledge and knowledge of others (134), one can recognize the limitations of one’s experiences and knowledge and create new meaning despite those limitations and actually in full recognition of them. It is another means of incorporating perspectives of others into an ever-changing individual point of view. Recognizing limitations and boundaries, as I will discuss in the next chapter, allows for freedom of movement and exploration within them, so the limitation of a simulated Dachau can nonetheless generate openings for creation of new meanings within individual

perspectives, though clearly they would be quite different from those generated by Dachau at the time of the Second World War.

When it comes to the war memorial, the visitor certainly realizes that he will not be able to experience “what the war was like,” but arrives with the expectation of the memorial standing as a majestic statement about the war itself. As Rowlands observes, “... war memorials have to be to some extent a special category where resolution is achieved by the extent to which visual forms unproblematically affirm ‘that they did not die in vain’.” (142) Though the World War II Memorial undeniably provides this affirmation, just a few blocks away Maya Lin’s Vietnam Memorial stands in stark contrast to it. Her design was and is still considered to be controversial because of its lack of resolution and absence of the conveyance of a sense of “rightness” regarding our participation in the Vietnam War. Though the distinction between a war memorial and other types of memorials is certainly important—like distinctions between memorials and monuments, as well as memorials and museums—the distinction is not as relevant to my current discussion of memorial architecture in general. Again, rather than an increasingly-specific examination of the structures and their roles in meaning-making, I intend to examine the ways in which generalizations can be made across all forms of memorialization, memories can be expanded to have multiple

meanings, and commonalities can be recognized rather than differences precisely examined.

Perhaps the war memorial as a structure can or should never escape the cultural demand for an element closure and healing, but the ways in which that cultural desire, and in fact all cultural desire for memorialization, is changing over time and generations is worth consideration. Further complicating the idea of expanding the definition of memorial particularly with regard to changes in meaning-making processes over time is again the ever-developing place of technology in society. With photos of any artifact immediately available on the internet, the roles of imagery and representation, simulacrum and reproduction, and especially determining “what it was like” and any expectation on the memorial regarding the healing of trauma, become necessary to acknowledge and interrogate in their involvement in the memorialization process. This will also be discussed in the following chapter on inscription, as it seems that a discussion of the virtual fits more closely to metaphor than material.

A final consideration in the process of attempting to define a memorial for the purposes of this discussion in light of the chosen structures is to address the question of how one might differentiate between a memorial and a museum, or perhaps better stated, how any museum could be considered a type of memorial.



The word museum, of course, originates from the Greek as a home for the Muses, inspirations for creativity and artistic expression. In contemporary use, we tend to think of museum as a physical repository of collected items rather than as a location (“location” used as a verbal form, for which we more commonly use “locating”) of thought and ideas. The prevailing Western assumption that a visitor to a museum only observes the art and creativity of others, rather than engages in his own active process of creativity, suggests our cultural positioning of observer as the acted-upon, a positioning which is not dissimilar to the viewpoint of visitors to memorials undergoing a multiplicity of transformative experiences. Both museum and memorial inhabit the realm of presentation and definition for the observer, but they both provide opportunities for creative thought and meaning-making on an individual level as well. It is with this line of thought that I chose to use a memorial and a museum as my artifacts without further differentiation, as I consider both structures as designed to occupy a similar place in providing locations for meaning-making. The differences between the two (and in fact between the monument and memorial that some have so carefully delineated) are immaterial for my discussion, as the process of meaning-making is similar, though the structures, titles, and presentations may be different.

It is not my intention to discuss the exhibits in the Holocaust Museum, to analyze their “effectiveness”, or to provide a narrative of the events of the

Holocaust. Those important elements have been and continue to be done by scholars of the Holocaust, and I feel that my statements on the exhibits would contribute nothing new to that discussion. This is not to say, however, that the presence of the exhibits and the outlay of the museum itself are unimportant, only that the meaning of and human experience regarding the exhibits themselves is much beyond the scope of my analysis.

The final element vital to my working definition is that the placeholder may be tangible or intangible. Though architecture, clearly a concrete form of memorialization, is the scope of my discussion, it should be acknowledged from the start that the nature of a memorial is fluid and that a memorial could easily be something without physical shape at all. One need only consider a memoir, a book written as memorialization of a time or person, to justify an expansion of the thought of memorial. The bound volume itself is not the memorial, but rather the words and stories contained within it facilitate the gathering of thought. From there, it is not difficult to extrapolate that a conversation might be a form of memorializing—in a formalized sense, one thinks immediately of a eulogy, but in a freer consideration, a conversation between two people could serve as a memorial as well. A conversation, a spoken reminiscence, provides a different form of “location,” again not in the nominal sense of a physical place but as the verb for discovering a place. The locating of a memory need not be physical at

all—perhaps it could be seen as always at least partially metaphysical. It is at this juncture that the lines between the definitions of memory and memorial become blurred and begin to overlap, since perhaps it is not the physical structure that locates our memories, but that memory has discovered and identified the location for the memorial. My idea here is certainly informed by Heidegger’s comment in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” about a bridge over a stream: “The banks only emerge as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge expressly causes them to lie across from each other.” (356) The memorial only emerges as the memory allows and is situated only within the parameters of the memory, which is in itself intangible, malleable and constantly evolving.

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The ArtScience Museum in Singapore, designed by architect Moshie Safdie<sup>28</sup> and completed in 2011, draws visitors with the hope that the “combination

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<sup>28</sup> Moshie Safdie also designed the 2005 Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem. I purposely chose not to discuss that structure and opted for the Lotus Blossom instead so as not to cross-pollenate my discussion of metaphor with the specificity of memorial architecture. For this discussion, I felt a commercial

of beautiful design, intriguing content and intellectual discussion, [will] inspire the creativity in us all". Designed to resemble a lotus flower, the eco-friendly structure is made of high-tech materials and collects rainwater at its base for recycling and use within the building. Nicknamed the "Welcoming Hand of Singapore" by the Sands Hotel chair Sheldon Adelson, each of the fingers (I thought they should have been called petals) leads to a different gallery space which is infused with natural light from above, and the museum is itself a part of a recent development called, rather blandly, the Marina Bay Sands. This integrated resort, aside from the museum and the luxurious Sands hotel, contains theaters, a convention center, two event centers, a promenade, and an upscale shopping center. The space is designed to be visitor-friendly, almost all-inclusive, and offers numerous activities for the traveler. Despite the intriguing design of the hotel (and its rooftop infinity pool) and the entire complex, it is clear that the visual focus and the symbolic center is the Lotus Flower Museum.

Early reviews of the museum agree that the architecture overshadows the exhibits (CNN, archdaily.com) and a review of 2014 holiday season exhibits would tend to support their claims. At the end of 2014, the museum offered exhibits

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museum would allow for an introduction of metaphor without the added complication of the memorialization process.

about Harry Potter, ocean photography, ArtScience: A Journey Through Creativity, and a selection of Da Vinci drawings, hardly exceptional in content, but ideal for the purposes of examining the structure for its own sake rather than reducing it to blank white space secondary to the exhibits it houses<sup>29</sup>.

The structure is designed to present two immediate visual metaphors—the “welcoming hand” and the lotus flower—that distinguish it from other structures in the region but simultaneously place it as unique to Singapore. The metaphor of the welcoming hand presents itself as an undisguised attempt to attract visitors to the Marina Bay Sands complex by advertising itself as itself and signifies that the city is open to visitors on a global scale. Yet arguably the lotus flower metaphor achieves exactly the same result, only through the avenue of natural instead of the commercial. The open hand/flower base and the uptilted orientation signify one basic and crucial element of metaphor, described by Elisabeth Camp as “cognitive efficiency” (3). This cognitive efficiency, though it lies at the heart of the process of metaphor, linguistic or visual, is also its most problematic and restrictive element. Efficiency can be viewed as an updated version of Kantian

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<sup>29</sup> This is an important element in my choosing this structure, as my discussion of the Holocaust Museum in Chapter 4 will not include much more than a necessary nod to the exhibits and will focus almost entirely on the structure itself. Museums are often as structures subordinated to the exhibits they display and viewed as secondary, or in this case almost intrusive.

categorization, a means of structuring thought and thus necessarily limiting possibility, or, to paraphrase Camp's further statement, metaphors exploit characterizations. In other words, they reduce thoughts to known associations. Not dissimilar to images such as Rubin's vase (also known as a figure-ground image) which can also be viewed as two faces, the Welcoming Hand / Lotus Flower imagery necessarily reduces the viewer's choices to one of the two (or perhaps both) through the simple process of naming the structure. The structure could also resemble a Blooming Onion appetizer from the Outback Steakhouse restaurant, a reclining floor chair for playing video games, a beaky bird or a Beyblades toy—all things with which I am personally familiar, but all of which are allowed room for metaphorical expression only within my own interpretive and visual personal response to the building. The cognitive efficiency of metaphor and the naming of the metaphor(s) have already informed much of my thinking for me. Only if I am willing to step outside the presentation of the named metaphors can I expand my thoughts to other possibilities, yet without metaphor I am arguably not able to express my thoughts at all (since of course likening the structure to items in my own experience is doing exactly the same thing, for better and worse). This is the catch-22 in our expression and engagement with objects, and literary theorists, philosophers or artists, no matter how in depth their analysis, are unable to escape this bind. We are both restricted by and entirely dependent upon language in our

thinking, and metaphor is only one process that demonstrates this dependence—in other words, metaphor is a perfect metaphor for language.

This “being stuck,” however, once acknowledged, allows for the more secure locating of a common ground for the expression of thought and in fact may be the cornerstone of discussion of superficially unlike objects and thoughts. This trap of metaphor allows for a process which Sobolev calls a “comparison of incomparable things” with emphasis that they can be either true or false (913). If individual metaphors overlap, understanding may be achieved, and, more importantly, when they differ, a new perspective can be introduced with the goal of neither rejection nor acceptance, but only and entirely introduction of that new perspective. In short, conversation and the intellectual endeavor depend upon the metaphor’s efficiency of characterization but do not depend on any particular version of truth or universality of its application. Metaphor, then, for the purposes of this discussion can be viewed as a means through which a gap can be bridged, the Heideggerian abyss upon which all is constructed can be recognized, the intended meaning which can be both expanded and made irrelevant simultaneously. The “exploitation of conceptual similarity,” as Kaja Silverman describes (111), allows for a continual movement between the elements, to use her word, a “transversality” of meaning (110). Metaphor does not change the objects, rather it allows for change in perception and understanding of them and the



expansion of meaning across and among elements of thought. While this process is true of language in general, both in terms of lexical items and structure, the process is distilled and made more easily discernible in the realm of metaphor.

In his 2007 work *Critical Modernism: Where is Postmodernism Going?*, Charles Jencks discusses the definition and role of postmodern architecture using what almost becomes a language of metaphor. He describes late postmodern (and probably what other scholars would consider “contemporary”) architecture as having an “enigmatic signifier,” what in his definition is “an implicit allusion” made to look like “everything and nothing in particular” (62). He describes this development in architecture as a response to the reductionist connotation of icon<sup>30</sup> and its obviousness—architecture needed a means of countering the reduction by expressing an expansion in the form. This would include the ideas of “folding in differences,” for example Frank Gehry’s curvilinear designs, and a comparison to the continually-evolving and ever-rebuilding structure of DNA in terms of architectural critique, response and restructuring. The allusion is implicit, not overt, and the referent is not always clear (or singular). The intent of creating a structure to look like “everything and nothing in particular,” though, while a most

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<sup>30</sup> And I completely agree with his assessment on this technologically-driven shift in the meaning of the word.

captivating construct, seems to exemplify that old conundrum of historical postmodernism (which will be discussed at length in the following chapter): the gulf between the theory and its implementation. This seems like a reiteration of the old saying “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,” with the spirit as the expansive theory that seeks to nudge at if not outright destroy the status quo, and the flesh as the restrictive limitations of the physical world. It may be that there ultimately is nothing new in the construct of the enigmatic signifier, as, through the use of metaphor, *any* object can arguably look like everything and nothing in particular, but certainly the use of the construct of “everything and nothing in particular” in Postmodern architectural expression is visible.

When its expression is not limited to a physical form, however, the enigmatic signifier becomes a parallel structure to metaphor. Though undoubtedly all signifiers are unstable or at least open to varying interpretations, this does not necessarily connote an overtly obfuscating tendency—in fact, I argue that metaphor overall enhances understanding between or among individuals by providing a negotiated and systematic finding of common ground between the individual interpretations—in the same way that viewing signifiers as enigmatic

does. Enigmatic connotes a deliberate mystery, inscrutability or opacity<sup>31</sup> and stands as a contrast to the expansiveness of metaphor. Metaphor, then, is more than an “implicit allusion” in that it relies upon explicit expression in order to be recognized and understood. Rather than relying on an implicit decision made by a theorist (or architect)—because by making the implication clear, the implication is that the allusion has only one result—metaphor allows for a range of possibility in the engagement with an object or idea, with a much broader space for the individual to assert limited agency in creating a singular interpretation pursuant to his unique historical position, intellectual disposition and aesthetic point of view.

This brings to mind the process of nicknaming, a human creative endeavor that is not often enough mentioned as a metaphorical element within the communicative process, but one which I would argue is fundamental to the progression of our thought and the descriptive means by which we choose to engage others and to take advantage of “conceptual similarity” while at the same time expressing some personal engagement with it. Recent academic articles focus on nicknaming sports teams or places of historical relevance, but the process

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<sup>31</sup> Here I go with the etymology again: the root verb of *enigma* means “to speak in riddles.” This most definitely connotes a deliberate, conscious action of making something difficult to understand.

itself as a form of metaphor (or metonymy) is worth mention as a precursor of the facet of engagement we demonstrate with architecture and our own structuring of thought.

Though I do not intend to enter into a lengthy discussion of forms of metaphor and metonymy, as categorizing and analyzing their differences and uses are much more safely left to literary theorists, I do feel that a quick nod to the playful practice of nicknaming is of intellectual relevance here<sup>32</sup>. Without becoming trapped by terminology and tropes of expression, the discussion for my purposes is one of common function rather than literary style and how this usage impacts our thinking. Much like in the way Charles Jencks describes the naming and classification of periods as a “necessary fiction” (18) and Hayden White describes history as the extension of a narrative account, the nicknaming of buildings can be used as a means of describing a not-exclusive but still-relevant mechanism by which we appropriate some form of ownership of the structure. Certainly the process of nicknaming can have a pejorative element, but that negative trajectory is counterbalanced by the endearing use of the form as well.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Again, I feel that nicknaming, like architectonic language to describe thought, is so wholly pedestrian a phenomenon that we tend to overlook its impact because of its very familiarity. It speaks volumes, however, in my mind in terms of description, metaphor and individual meaning-making. My own loved ones have always had nicknames, and only in official capacities do I refer to them by their “proper” names.

<sup>33</sup> While I recognize the power dynamic involved in nicknaming and the type of objectification it can encompass, I stand by the conviction that it is no less or no more detrimental or restrictive a process that

On that note, there are two types of metaphorical or metonymic expression that I feel relate directly to our engagement with thought and architecture, hypocorism and antonomasia.

Hypocorism, the use of pet names, is so commonplace that we tend to relegate it to a low position in terms of intellectual expression if we consider it at all, but in fact it deserves recognition in terms of an individual's meaning-making process. What is more restrictive and defining, yet individual and expressive at the same time, than a name? A nickname refits an already-defined person or object into a new frame, and, though the person or object is still the "same" one, the meaning we have attributed to it has undergone a most personal revision. It is almost a remodeling or resurfacing, but one which requires at least some level of familiarity with the object or person. The more familiar the object or person, the more singular the nickname, and the more personal the association made, even up to the nicknaming of oneself or the group with which one identifies. Maria Lugones describes the practice as one example of the "festive resistance" of curdling-separation that can serve as a means of overcoming or at least managing

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selecting an actual name. Even a politically correct nickname—and here I think of 'curvy'—that can be viewed as empowering, can be used in a pejorative manner. In my discussion I only address the process of nicknaming of buildings as a means through which individuals can demonstrate a sense of "ownership" in a positive way.

oppression and social commentary (“Purity”, 486) rather than a form of oppression or control itself. In so far as any type of knowledge can be considered a form of ownership, and in the Western tradition we at least acknowledge that is to some degree a given parameter, the reclamation or reestablishment of identity through a deliberate alternate name choice may speak to processes of inclusion and further grounds for achieving understanding or knowledge.

The word hypocorism has as one of its roots the suggestion of the Greek verb “to caress,” and the intellectual caress of redefinition and renaming is a very intimate and personal gesture indeed. This is the element of metaphor, not the concrete comparison, not the conceptual alignment, nor the cognitive efficiency that is most relevant to my project and to the opening of a platform for the discussion of our approaches to our own thinking. Comparing two objects, creating an allusion or streamlining the mental categorization process are all certainly valuable means of structuring thought, but one goal of my project is to investigate other perhaps less traditional means of arriving at metaphors and ideas through inclusion, expansion and openness. This is not to say that it will be successful, of course, but only that it will have been an avenue explored.

Nicknaming is both reductive and expansionary, of course, but it allows for an introduction of the personal and affective into the meaning-making process and

the engagement of a person with an idea or an object. Renaming an object—whether it is a piece of architecture, a person or an idea in our minds—illuminates the underlying individual structural framework which privileges certain personally meaningful characteristics. This is not unlike Robert Kirkbride’s description of all of the architectonics of memory (and I would certainly add metaphor here as well) as “tactics of containment” (31). Containment simultaneously circumscribes and liberates a memory, an idea, a name, and in so doing defines the metaphorical process. Akin to the policy of containment during the Cold War, in which the goal of “gradual mellowing” of Soviet influence expressed in George Kennan’s 1947 “X Article” would quickly become the policy of “rollback” outlined by John Foster Dulles a few years later, containment as a process of metaphor (or memory) demonstrates our desire to exert conscious control over meaning-making by defining the boundaries of the metaphor or memory in order to restrict its power (or applicability). Containing an object, nation or idea involves delineating boundaries separating one from another, and recognizing the unique and threatening nature of the object, nation or idea if it were not tamed or restricted by an outside force. Naming is a tactic of containment, nicknaming allows for a personal interpretation (though not always positive) connotation and re-naming of the contained.

Antonomasia, though arguably less creative overall, is also important to my discussion in terms of the redescription process and provides a relevant point from which a discussion of the private versus the public memorial can be undertaken. Antonomasia, I would suggest, stands as the more public of the two terms, as it relies upon some unambiguous and easily recognizable characteristic leading to the renaming of an object, some universally acknowledged concrete facet. Current architecture often is subject to antonomasia, and perhaps this is because of its inescapably public nature<sup>34</sup>. It seems that recent buildings are given nicknames, perhaps because the proper names are too laborious or unimaginative or because of a local desire to express a feeling of propriety, and more frequently these nicknames become replacements for the actual names of structures. For instance, there is a Marilyn Monroe tower in Ontario, a Cheese Grater in London, and the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing, all nicknames which are much more imaginatively appealing and memorable than their proper names of the Absolute World Towers, the Leadenhall Building, or the Beijing National Stadium.

Strangely, though (or perhaps not so strangely after all), this process seems to have begun occurring on a large scale towards the end of the Twentieth

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<sup>34</sup> Think of how many buildings have nicknames, even here in Louisville. The Cash Register of Humana, the unmentionable name for the Aegon Center (now 400 West Market) and the "lace building" Kaden Tower.



Century. Prior to this, most famous Modernist structures were and are known by their proper names—think only of the numerous houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright identified by the surnames of the original residents, the many office buildings by Mies van der Rohe named for their geographic location, their corporate client or their function—and I would suggest that this antonomasia has become a much more widespread phenomenon in recent decades because of the proliferation of images and publicity for architectural structures that have arisen as a result of technology. One need only Google the Pregnant Oyster building (yes, there is one), and images of it are instantly available, from all angles, its interior and exterior, at twilight and in bright sunshine. Even though one may never travel to Berlin, the image is easily accessed in seconds. We desire some sort of, perhaps not ownership of, but surely personal engagement with (or containment of) a structure, even if we have only seen its image. In contrast to the more personal and private nature of the hypocorism, this public version of a nickname is the role of antonomasia—the redescription of an object to arrive at some culturally relevant level of engagement with it.

It is here I would have to both agree and disagree with Richard Rorty in his statement that “Ironism ... results from awareness of the power of redescription. But most people do not want to be redescribed. They want to be taken on their own terms...” (89). Though he references people here, I would apply it to our

processes of approaching architecture and structures of our own thought as well. While I would agree that there is much power in the process of redescription, it need not be a power that is confrontational, necessarily, or adversarial, but could instead represent a power that includes the capacity to unite or to make aware. It is also not a power specifically appropriated by the ironist, but rather one that can be embraced on a societal level, not to provide a definitive redescription that is more privileged than the rest, but rather to provide a space for multiple redescriptions, all of which are meaningful at the local level, some of which transcend those limited boundaries into recognition on a public one.

At this point, having acknowledged the processes of metaphor via nicknaming and in regard to architecture in general, the next step is to apply this line of examination specifically to memorial architecture. Again, as stated in an earlier chapter, it is not my intent to parse out distinctions between monuments and memorial architecture. For the purposes of this study, any structure which is designed to commemorate an event or person is considered memorial architecture, no matter whether it is public or private, and no matter its shape or name (including a museum). My intent is to examine whether our patterns of engagement with a structure—and the structuring of thought that runs parallel to that engagement—reflect anything specific to memorial architecture that is not

present for architecture in general. In other words, (how) does knowing that a structure is a memorial affect thinking?

Before examining the specificity of inscription and returning to the delineation of public versus private, the overall process of memorializing itself might be mentioned here as potentially one that can be described as a process of metaphor. Metaphors, as Christopher Tilley writes in Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology, are “creative and infinitely generative in their allusions and the manner in which they permit the creation of meanings. They are not an embellishment or an elaboration of an originary and primary literal language but constitute its very essence as a mode of communication.” (23) Monumentation can be described as a metaphorical process made tangible in its range of possibility (though I hesitate to say “infinite,” as Tilley does, since I contend that containment and exclusion are always parameters of thought, no matter how creative), but at the same time must be recognized to be simultaneously limited by the means chosen to represent its “purpose,” or what set of things we are intended to understand from the monument. Kaja Silverman describes the function of metaphor, framing it in terms of absence, writing, “Each [element] recalls, but does not replace the other; the distance which separates them is as important as their initial juxtaposition.” (112) So a literal association between a named memorial structure, a tombstone or a war memorial for example, and our

psychical associations with it could be both as closely linked as intended but also as far removed from each other in the same way that architecture and philosophy are linked in interdependence yet remain forever separate and distanced from (and by) each other.

Architect John Whiteman writes, “Nothing is actually happening in architecture, at least not all at once; there is no single story for it to tell. Indeed, architecture is the limit of narrative, at least when it is successful as architecture. If a story can be told of a building, there is, I think, a certain kind of architectural failure there”. (51) Though this statement might initially seem deflationary, it can also be viewed as further evidence that (“successful,” whatever that is) architecture is not the ultimate *thing* that is discussed when one discusses architecture. When we talk about a building, the discussion is of our thought, and our ways of thinking about architecture and about ourselves. We construct a *Cathedral* in our own Raymond Carver story so that we may share our understanding and meaning with others. In one view, architecture is not a story, rather it allows a space for the telling of stories; it is a limitation on narrative because it is not a narrative—it is the place in which narrative and thought are grounded. Architecture is bound by its physicality, and there reaches the extent of its story (which reflects Whiteman’s position). Any narrative architecture “tells” is one that has had a human agent at its root and any architectural metaphor

employed is the result of a conscious human effort to structure and rationalize our engagement with existence. The metaphor of architecture and the architectonic linguistic structures are apt descriptors for philosophy and the structuring of human thought because they are always removed from them just as they are always being relied upon. Architecture itself is not doing anything to us<sup>35</sup>, rather we are making and interpreting it and always have been, but it is a useful construct for allowing us to understand the parameters and limitations of our own thought.

From another perspective, however, architecture can indeed be seen as a story, one that runs parallel to many others. Though admittedly I tend to agree with Whiteman above, I recognize that writ large, architecture, like any other construct, is one of any number of nodes from which meaning can be derived. The concept of an overarching teleological narrative has been subject to Postmodernist and pluralist critique and was exposed as lacking. In the contemporary moment, coexisting narratives certainly have room for expression in a way they did not decades ago. One of these narratives, of course, is that of the traditional Modernist view, but now alongside and intersecting it exist a multiplicity of other

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<sup>35</sup> ...phenomenology aside, and I leave that can of worms for someone else to open. And there is some contention that in recent decades architecture has forgotten all about people. How architecture could possess the ability to forget is beyond me, but I would agree that theory and design appear to focus more on form and presentation.

perspectives. It is through these marginalized perspectives that we can begin to understand and incorporate new narratives. Whether architecture is a narrative itself is debatable, and it is my assertion that architecture can be used to facilitate the development of narratives more easily than being one itself, however the presence of compelling competing views on this subject suggests that this would be an area for future personal research and contemplation in order to develop my thesis further.

Metaphor and naming, public and private, representation and restriction, within these parameters we can begin to discuss memorial architecture and the possibilities it provides. There does seem to be an inherent difference, of course, between memorial architecture and architecture in general, if for no other reason than inclusion of the descriptive adjective, but questions remain regarding what that difference could be and the ways in which it might affect the structuring of thought. Perhaps it is simplest to begin with the concrete example of the most obvious difference—that of the inclusion of the name “memorial.” Because metaphor and language are the means by which we make our thoughts—and make our thoughts known—the inherent having-been-named quality of a memorial must surely serve a function in the way we first conceptualize the artifact and the structuring of our thought around it, without immediately and consciously addressing the form of the memorial itself. Scholar James E. Young

quotes Austrian writer Robert Musil: “There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen—indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention.”

(13) The attraction certainly is that of the monumentation process—the Augustinian gathering up of and making room for thought in a delineated space—while the repellent (or I prefer to restate it as the element of disappointment, since “repellent” sounds unduly harsh) facet of the actual form of the monument is that its very concreteness, as with every image, makes it an always-inadequate representation of memory. In order to counteract this inadequacy, inscription had traditionally played a part in the framing of memorial architecture, but I suggest that it only serves to extend the jointly operating forces of limitation and liberation.

Clearly, inscription and ornamentation are traditional, almost ubiquitous, Western features of grave marking, indicating corporeal location and, perhaps more importantly, serving as a tangible trigger for memory of the deceased. Because the memorial structure is designed to reference the eternal (or at least stand in temporal longevity), as discussed in a previous chapter, the most common material of formalized memorialization is stone<sup>36</sup>. From a historic standpoint, the

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<sup>36</sup> The roadside memorials and temporary “shrines” to victims of tragic or violent deaths serve as a fascinating parallel to this and blur the distinctions between public and private memorialization even further, but those

etymology of the adjective “lapidary” in English can be traced back to the Latin root for “stone,” not only in terms of a precious stone or jewel but also in a manner connoting considerable brevity and precision in language. Because stone was (and is) expensive, as was the actual engraving of the stone, since ancient times the language of the memorial has been necessarily concise, and thus restrictive. Even in present-day usage, the adjective “lapidary” is used to define language as “suitable for engraving ... elegant and concise” (OED.com). What had surely begun as economic prudence has developed into a Western cultural tradition of transmission of factual data about the individual deceased: name, date of birth, date of death. These are the salient features of a recognized and commemorated life, perhaps serving as a reminder of the equalizing force of death as well.

One means of acknowledging individual existence and serving as a counter to the presentation of merely factual data, almost a nickname of sorts, is the epitaph, an attempt to summarize the life experiences or *Weltanschauung* of the deceased into a short string of words. An epitaph can be problematic, of course, since in an attempt to summarize the life of the individual, it necessarily directs and limits our thoughts about him. Occasionally, however, its brevity can allow for

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practices are intentionally not included in my discussion because they deserve much more attention than I could give them here.



and encapsulate a fundamental nuance of a person to all who might have known him.<sup>37</sup> When one has not personally known the deceased, however, the possibilities for interpretation are circumscribed in a construct more or less akin to a historical inquiry—assimilating secondhand information (or perhaps anecdotes or artifacts) into an “image” of the deceased upon which then the epitaph is superimposed. The message is only interpretable through the once-removed filter of history, and is thus questionable in terms of the possibilities for a “true” or “individual” interpretation by the observer. To counter this linguistic restriction, epitaphs have often been carefully crafted to reflect just the right sentiment about the deceased for posterity. Though last words can serve the same purpose, the effect is rather different with the epitaph because of its lasting, written nature—an immortal nod to their existence or a catchy slogan to remember them by. One epitaph which can be described as meta (before there ever was such a thing) might be that of 18<sup>th</sup> Century architect Sir Christopher Wren, buried in London’s Saint Paul’s Cathedral, which he designed. It reads: “If you seek his monument, look around you.” If one did not already know that Wren was an architect, or that he

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<sup>37</sup> I would be utterly remiss if I did not mention here the impact one person’s chosen future epitaph has had upon my thinking, both in terms of this dissertation and, more importantly, of my own life. And that is: “Here lies Mark Blum: He tried.” It is a most delightful summation for a most delightful human being.

had designed the cathedral, one might interpret this statement to say that the cathedral stands as a monument to God. However if one is aware of Wren's occupation, one understands this epitaph as the architect's arguably vainglorious pat on his own back. In either case, the epitaph is a usually self-chosen representation of the person after his death, and our thoughts are very much directed toward a specific interpretation if it, particularly if we have no personal connection with the deceased.

In a private monument, the deceased is directly represented by name, but in a public (or, more precisely here, a collective) one, the process of naming the memorialized may only serve to intensify the otherness of the deceased. The language chosen for an epitaph, an inscription or a name interprets for us, of course, and we exhibit our tacit complicity in this process each time we view a monument and immediately question for whom or what purpose the monument has been erected. This reveals our dependence on the process of naming (and here I would include metaphor as a kind of analogy-based naming process) or labeling to garner a basic type of meaning, if only to narrow the parameters of the topic of engagement. We need someone to have given us the words by which we can identify the beginnings of our thought. Certainly, to be considered a memorial, a structure implicitly contains a differentiation between a cultural past and present in a way much different than the private memorial in that there is no necessary

undercurrent of inclusion in the private monument. In a 2008 article, Anita Kasabova writes that, rather than means of establishing continuity with the present, memorials are in essence semantic means of dealing with the past. She justifies her position by analysis of grammatical tense, asserting that “a past event is the antecedent grounding a present situation” (1), and presents an interesting linguistically-driven presentation of the role of history and memory in memorials. The difficulty with this, as intellectually fruitful and engaging as it is, lies in the fact that the development of a tense-based analysis leaves (or opens up) room for other semantic problems—what constitutes a “past event” or a “present situation,” and in which ways these term might be applicable to and complicate our understanding of a memorial. Distinguishing past from present is in my mind not a problem for which there is a strictly grammatical means of distinction, however for the purposes of my discussion here, Kasabova’s assertion that the past grounds the present combined with the traditional view that they are distinct temporal constructs will suffice, though the problems associated with doing so are readily acknowledged.

Culturally, we as subjective viewers are quite comfortable with the process of memorialization when its intended object is represented clearly for us beforehand and when we have an expectation of our engagement with the structure, in other words, to paraphrase Kasabova, when we know how to

interpret the influence of the past event on our present situation. Intuitively memorial and monument are familiar territory, the already-known, comforting in the nod to the eternal, solidly defined in meaning, and tangibly representative of our memory. It is this complacency with the traditional form that should be subject to the same processes as the disciplines of architecture and philosophy themselves: *sollicitare*, a shaking of foundation, a gnawing through of edifice. The sacred place which the collective monument inhabits is by its nature restrictive and oppressive to our memory--we are, after all, nothing short of instructed how and what to think, though I contend this may not be such a bad thing after all.

Georges Bataille interrogated the overarching problem of public architecture in his 1929 essay "Against Architecture," observing that "the form of the cathedral or palace is the way the state or church speaks to the masses and imposes silence upon them." Of course, Bataille uses strong language to make his case, but considering this statement with a milder eye and only in regard to memorial architecture can reveal that the imposed silence is both mutual and volitional, that the "silenced" benefit from the limitation. The version of silence that culture (or language) uses memorial architecture to place upon the individual (and I do believe this is the case, as difficult as the wording is) prohibits the construct of "infinite possibility" to which I objected earlier, but nonetheless allows for the making of some, but not just any or all, versions of meaning. Here

is what I might call the ultimate influence—purpose is certainly too strong a word—of memorial architecture on culture, and architectonic language on thought. The parameters of each allow the freedom to work within them, and the established boundaries afford room for the framing or creation of meaning, something I might describe as purposefully directed thought which nonetheless retains room for individual variability and experience. In her article “Thinking About Ecological Thinking,” Lorraine Code expresses a similar description of boundary drawing as a necessary delimiting force in expressing thought because including and understanding everything is admittedly impossible. She goes on to add that at the same time boundaries may be thought and lived piecemeal, this does not mean that the result is necessarily one of “fragmentation, contradiction, or isolation” (192). Thought can only be approached with the hopes of being partially understood or recognized when viewed within boundaries and parameters we knowingly place upon it. Though Bataille surely has it correct in terms of government and organized religion exerting control over and silencing the individual, memorial architecture has little to gain, in fact it couldn’t gain anything if it wanted to, from our engagement with it or its parameters. Rather than an agent, it is a symbol, a metaphor, or a ground

The linguistic turn and human agency are certainly still issues of contention among theorists, postmodern, poststructuralist or otherwise, and while I

acknowledge those scholars who suggest that humans are no longer agents of history but rather “patients” or objects, that is not a discussion to which I can contribute anything new, nor does it serve my purposes in providing a platform for the discussion of architectonic language on our ways of thinking. It is worth noting, however, that throughout this document, in every circumstance, it is my working assumption that a human agent is creating the image, choosing the language, and employing the metaphor. My discussion of “the architectonic language of philosophy” always presupposes human agents using the language, creating the philosophy and describing the thoughts, while statements regarding architecture “providing a space” naturally also presuppose a human agent creating the structure. The architecture and language only exist because of the human creation of and use of them and in no way do I intend to suggest that either has any agency. When either word is used with an action verb, the presupposition is that the noun—language or architecture—is in its final state, already created or chosen by humans. In this way, architecture and language are even more strongly tied to each other in the expression of human thought, in that they become the means by which humans solidify and transmit their ideas to each other. Just as there is an architect behind every structure, there is a speaker (or chooser) behind every utterance. As I will argue in my final chapter, humankind is not finished with our former ways of being human quite yet.

To be clear, my intent with this discussion is not to propose a new means of approaching agency or a revision of any former approaches, but only to mention possible means we can employ to analyze our own responses to memorial architecture, only one of which is that of the human as an object. Fitzhugh and Leckie describe "... the theorist's privilege of standing outside history... [as] quite literally an out-of-body experience" (63)<sup>38</sup>. Theory, as will be addressed in the following chapter, is undoubtedly useful as a means of structuring thought but is not the definitive means through which thought can be structured. For my purposes, too heavy a reliance on theory could over-complicate the discussion of memorial architecture, or at the very least can be seen to discourage or minimize otherwise valid perspectives, including those of individuals informed by the already-known but not completely restricted by it and those of individuals who have been traditionally excluded from it.

Whether individual memory exists in a capacity that leads to meaning-making in the present is certainly debatable, but again exploring a definitive answer to this question is outside the scope of this study. For my heuristic

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<sup>38</sup> This article deals with the present/future position of the historian in the wake of postmodernist theory, relying on, of all things, cognitive science for a new direction. I found this idea fascinating, and I would have liked to incorporate more of my thoughts on it, but they would stray far from the focus of this document. I disagree with their claims about Foucault, the closed-system of language and the possibilities for change--they make it sound as though being trapped in a paradox is a bad thing!—but it nonetheless got me thinking.

purposes, here I consider individual memory to be a variable, always-biased, incomplete but nonetheless valid construct based on the experiences and predispositions of a single human operating within the cultural, linguistic and phenomenological environment of his time. From that standpoint, I would have to disagree in part with James E. Young's statement that, "A monument turns pliant memory to stone." (*Texture*, 13) As discussed in the previous chapter, memory can always be considered pliable, open to revision and falsification, and singularly unreliable. To suggest, then, that a monument asserts restrictive agency over a constantly-shifting human process is far from the position I would be willing to take here. Individual memory and meaning-making are not crystallized and frozen in a memorial, but they are instead given a set of parameters, without the concrete form of which they could not be examined at all. The memorial, perhaps most moderately but appropriately stated, might be best described as providing what Maarten Delbeke calls "an analogous space." (99) Here the metaphor, with its parameters that allow some—but not too much—room for meaning-making, affords the human memory a place to interact with the concrete as a process of metaphor. Rather than provide the definitive version of the conceptualization of a memory of an event, a memorial influences the human ability to reconceptualize, revise and restructure one's own meaning-making processes and one's own ways of thinking about thinking. In other words, akin to



the role of architectonic language in philosophical inquiry, a memorial might be considered a starting point for further thought, a descriptor for the mode and language of discussion, and a means of filling in the gaps in individual or cultural knowledge so that numerous versions of understanding and perspective can be reached about an event.

Memorial architecture is, of course, very often collective in nature, and by use of this term of course one is drawn into yet another semantic conundrum. Is a collective memorial the same as a public one? Where do the boundaries of the term collective begin and end? Who is included within the collective—only those who are commemorated or are the observers included as well? Here a nod to Habermas' public sphere is in order, not in terms of politics or economy, but rather in terms of whether the public and private should or even could be separated in terms of memorial architecture. His contention that publicity by design is manipulative is both true and untrue when applied to an engagement with architecture. Certainly any object, idea, design or thought can be viewed as manipulative, and for political and economic systems this holds its own set of problematic outcomes, but when one expands a consideration of the process into an intellectual or philosophical realm, manipulation need not be so negative a term. What if manipulation of thought were akin to manipulation of, say, a limb during a medical exam—a method of determining range of motion, possibility,

strength—or physical therapy, when manipulation is conducted for a therapeutic purpose? Manipulation of material in clothing design reveals the way it best falls, fits, or can be combined with other materials into a garment. If we are indeed manipulated by a making-public, in the case of architecture, this may be a desirable phenomenon after all. By employing architectonic language in philosophy and by regarding memorial architecture as a path of meaning-making of past events, we can actively participate in manipulation of our own thoughts—not with the negative connotation of trickery, but with the medical connotation of investigating the range of motion and strength of the ways in which we think, and with the textile-based connotation of continual readjustment and interrelation to both itself and unlike “textures”. In this way, manipulation loses its negative connotation and becomes another manifestation of the platform for inquiry and discussion that I have posited throughout this document. Considering manipulation in its diagnostic and therapeutic capacity can open our notions of thought, collectivity and the historical process (and that’s just for starters).

Considering the way metaphorical processes influence our thinking, one can trace this pattern of simultaneous restriction and expansion even further when regarding inscription upon a piece of memorial architecture. Clearly, inscription amplifies the always-suspect role of language, and my intention here is again not to revise any theories or present any new ideas, only to suggest possible avenues

for ways in which this could serve to frame our thoughts. In order to arrive at a very small-scale discussion of inscription for current purposes, however, I will limit my comments to inclusionary and temporal elements, acknowledging that the selection of any elements will always be reductive and incomplete.

First it seems that the question of enumeration, a version of inscription, should be quickly addressed. As a popular example of memorial architecture for the past three decades, Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial lists names of 58,000 servicemen who died in that war, an extensive, personal acknowledgement to be sure, but one which opens the question as to whether this memorial is somehow more meaningful or how its meaning might be different because of what is considered to be its more personal nature. In terms of metaphor, one could liken the Vietnam Memorial to an extended gravestone which recognizes the individuality of each fallen soldier. General Westmoreland, in fact, proclaimed the structure a "masterpiece" because of its simplicity of form and enumeration of each death in chronological order. This would seem to point to an efficacy in the simple act of inscribing names (a lapidary conceit) that allows for very personal engagement with the memorial, but one wonders if this could also serve a barrier to achieving understanding of the significance of the entirety of the war as an event. Almost in opposition to this drive for observers to find the name of their loved one and achieve some personal meaning from the memorial, Maya Lin

explains that she specifically did not talk to veterans about their experiences in the war because she would consider that “prying into other people’s business”. Though she considers viewing the memorial to be “an act of participation” (*Lectures*), the distance between the “business” of other people, herself, the observer and the structure itself is apparent in her approach to the design and stands as recognition of the simultaneous presence and absence (or perhaps nearness and distance might describe it better) of the observer when viewing the memorial.

Popularly the perception of the Vietnam Memorial is that the inscription of individual names makes it unique in meaning-making possibilities among the monuments in Washington DC, but with the overabundance of singular nodes of information<sup>39</sup> the ability of the observer to focus on the general, rather than the specific, could easily be diminished. So the very element of inscription that makes Lin’s memorial personally poignant on one hand could also be seen to shift perspective from the entirety of the event to the loss of a particular individual on the other, and in that way stand as a large-scale version of a gravestone rather than a collective memorial. When one steps back from the inscription, however, and is

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<sup>39</sup> Here I use a sanitized replacement for the word “names” to remove any suggestion of disrespect for the deceased

able to focus on the structure itself, its material, shape, and size incorporate physical (but not overtly linguistic) elements of metaphor into the meaning-making process.

In his book on Deleuze and the culture of memorialization, Adrian Parr writes, "...the [Vietnam] memorial is opposed to memorialization in that it doesn't attempt to look back and pass judgment or lay blame....it presents a nonhuman wound: a landscape that has been sliced open..." (71) Though here Parr is granting agency to the structure in a way I am not willing to support completely — as stated earlier, I believe the memorial is a metaphor or symbol available to us for use but that does not exert complete agency over the observer (much less be capable of passing judgment or laying blame)—his conceptualization of the structure as a "nonhuman wound" is apt for shifting the observer's perspective to the large-scale event (or perhaps atrocity) rather than the small-scale individual tragedy. Pan out to the entire structure, the whole of the sliced-open landscape instead and the Vietnam War as an event becomes the focus parallel to the fallen soldiers<sup>40</sup>. The metaphor of a wound still allows for a connotation of what Rowlands calls an implication of injustice and a desire for revenge in a "bad

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<sup>40</sup> The Vietnam Memorial does not delineate whether the war or the individual lives are being commemorated, unlike other memorials which are more specifically named. Here I think of Eisenman's "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe."

death.” (131) This is a concept easily adopted for a Holocaust Memorial, but one that becomes much more ambiguous for the Vietnam War. If the individual names are the focus, the representative nature of a “bad death” becomes much more problematic and potentially offensive whereas the metaphor of a generalized societal wound allows for a less troublesome recognition of the possibility of injustice and a suggestion of revenge, as Rowlands suggests. The event itself can culturally be viewed as contributing to a process involving “bad death,” but making that statement with regard to an individual opens up possibilities for judgment of their actions or prejudicial in terms of their worth. Nonetheless, memorial architecture inherently contains an element of the healing after—if not revenge for—an event despite its taking shape as a gaping wound, a dissembled and fractured Star of David, or any other signifier of discord and trauma.

The second element in specifically memorial architecture that can open further room for discussion is that of temporal relevance. As noted, one basic element of a memorial is that it refers to or symbolizes a past event, and this means that metaphorically it serves as a bridge between that past event and the present observer. Defining an observer in the present, of course, is a complicated issue, but in order to discuss the memorial works in the following chapter, I would subcategorize the observer here in three ways: one who experienced the event (a veteran or Holocaust survivor), one who has a personal but not firsthand

relationship to the event (a family member of a veteran or Holocaust survivor), and one who has only a culturally- and historically-based knowledge of the event with no direct personal connection. Undoubtedly this oversimplifies the role of the observer, but here this threefold distinction can contribute to the platform for discussion without overwhelming it too many variations and too many definitions<sup>41</sup>.

Clearly a firsthand participant in an event, a veteran or survivor of an atrocity will have a much different qualitative response to a memorial in terms of memory and subsequently meaning-making than the other two types of observers. This position I would suggest could be the one from which a phenomenological engagement with a structure could be most easily communicated, since the actual—or it is perhaps better to say personal—memory of an event could certainly have connection to the physical form of the memorial that is beyond the symbolic. The middle position, that of a family member of a soldier or survivor, is similar in that the memorial is personally relevant, connected, if not to the firsthand knowledge of the event, then to a direct participant in that event. What impact

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<sup>41</sup> I think here of one of my students in a 20<sup>th</sup> Century History class who said she considered herself a Holocaust survivor, since her grandparents had survived the concentration camps. The entire class hour that day we discussed the nature of being a survivor. I would consider her self-identification outside probably what is the norm, and I couldn't begin to address all of the possibilities here.

that circumstance has upon the meaning-making process surely depends upon the level of identification the observer has with the role of their friend or family member, and here an opportunity for continuing study of this indefinite, liminal position would be productive for developing my ideas beyond the current project.

The third position, however, the one most observers arguably find themselves occupying, is that of the “detached” outsider for whom the event is only familiar through a historical or cultural lens. This is the observer whom I have referenced throughout this document, and, though incomplete and superficial as it is, my discussion will continue to assume this as the default position of the observer in this work. As earlier stated, I am not delineating a phenomenological experience of the structures in the following chapter or of memorial architecture in general, only recognizing some possibilities for using the works as grounds for discussion and analysis of the ways we structure our thinking, not what we think of them or how we experience them.

Here the Freudian notion of a visual form being able to liberate a person from a compulsion to relive the trauma is worth consideration regarding those who have suffered no trauma from the event. Does a collective trauma exist for those with whom a connection to the event is non-existent? Imagine a group of eighth-grade students on a school trip touring monuments in Washington DC.



They may know of the Holocaust, they may have a vague sense of World War II, but their ability to connect to the memorials and to make meaning from them is very uncertain and probably undeveloped. While there may be a sense of historical significance, there is also the looming question of what is it “supposed” to mean to a kid born over five decades after the war ended. Adrian Parr describes the role of memorials in overcoming our present circumstances by “the legitimate synthesis of utopian memory thinking: ... a practical experiment with the empirical material of memory and the real conditions of history.” (5) When a child has no “empirical material” outside of perhaps a textbook unit on America in the twentieth century (presuming any middle or high school class makes it past the colonial period), the meaning-making process becomes quickly overwritten by a prepackaged version of an explanation of why this structure is important. Even in terms of the way many adults view memorials, the already-known element of the event is the focus, and the meaning-making process may be left uninvestigated<sup>42</sup>.

This question of generational appeal and relevance of a memorial becomes more significant when one considers the virtual imagery available which

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<sup>42</sup> A museum at least affords some relief from this superficiality through more personal exhibits, but exhibits are excluded from my discussion for that very reason. They do not constitute memorial architecture in my view.

precludes the necessity of having to visit a structure in person. Here a nod to technological advances is certainly in order, since to some degree a visit to a memorial (or gravesite) could traditionally be described as a manner of pilgrimage<sup>43</sup>. When a visit is planned, contained expectation guides the thoughts we have along the way. Those middle school students walking down the Mall in Washington DC at least must shift their focus from, say, Abraham Lincoln and the vague knowledge they might have gained about him, toward the World War II Memorial, during which time the more distant past and nearer past overlap. This travel time, as it could be seen, allows space for some mental engagement with the journey—even if that engagement is at the most basic level of asking “What are we seeing next?” A pilgrimage or journey toward the physical structure at least provides time for a spatial organizational mechanism for our engagement with a piece of memorial architecture, an opportunity for the building of anticipation, a wondering of how the structure will look or what form it will take, perhaps some reflection upon the event and whether the memorial will contribute to our understanding of it. In this way thinking about thinking about the

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<sup>43</sup> An interesting psychiatric study on a pilgrimage to the Vietnam Memorial by veterans suffering from PTSD done in 1995 (Watson et al) showed marked improvement in symptoms short term, but an almost equal chance of a long term result of improvement or an exacerbation of symptoms.

memorialization process occurs almost naturally when we anticipate viewing a structure<sup>44</sup>.

In this age of technological simulation and virtual imagery, instant access to pictures are supplanting our engagement with memorials, and, arguably, the processes of thinking that enter into that engagement. Though a discussion on the virtual and advances in technology is far beyond my ken and my discussion here, but because of the instantaneous nature of their availability, I do feel a few comments are warranted. One important result of this virtual engagement is that it may limit our ways of thinking but not allow for an opening of them in quite the same way as viewing them in person (or even learning about them in scholarly sources). Online “visits” are often accompanied by comments and reviews from any number of people who need no qualification or expertise to share their thoughts, and though there is certainly room for this type of discussion in examining the effects on our own processes of thought and meaning-making, it can derail or interfere with our processes of thinking. Oftentimes these comments will include “don’t miss” elements or will provide factual information (though, to be sure, many others are often drivel), and, while this may be helpful, it at the same

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<sup>44</sup> In popular culture, and here I think about National Lampoon’s Vacation movies, people are often impatient when viewing architecture and reluctant to “take it all in,” but somehow this impatience and reluctance are subsumed under our human desire to recognize and commemorate historical events.

time reduces the desire to imagine, predict or speculate as to how one might arrive at meaning from the memorial. As Barrie Fez-Barrington explains, “The more the internet bombards us with images and solutions the less we have the time to ‘picture’. Design may be a lost art” (6). This reluctance to “picture” things or to anticipate experiences in our minds is a worrisome societal trend as people become more impatient with speculation, introspection and a playful sense of uncertainty in favor of Googling factual data (usually promptly forgotten anyway), looking up what one is “supposed to get” from a structure, or giving in to a growing enamoration with what is the often perfected form of the virtual over the actual.

With memorial architecture, the distance is already present between the structure and the observer—the very distance that allows for but simultaneously restricts the meaning-making process—but achieving and maintaining intergenerational relevance is of some concern when we think about how this process informs our own structuring of thought. The “middle man” here, the middle ground, of physical presence and temporal absence, is usurped by the always-insurmountable distance of the virtual. My intention here is not to say that the virtual is not itself another valid form of reality of course. Here I only hope to point out that the restrictions on the meaning-making process with memorials and the impact of the distance on the architectural language of our thought are brought into sharper relief as technologies advance. In ten or twenty years, when our

vocabularies have incorporated countless numbers of yet-unimagined technological advances, the question will be to what end will this process work alongside—or to what degree even replace—the architectonic language of thought dating back to before the ancients and to what extent to future generations will consider memorials even to be relevant in their physical forms.

The one reliable bridge for communication between the virtual image and the concrete form, however, is metaphor. The image is a representation already, and if this representation can be likened to a representation of the physical structure, the metaphor can serve almost to “triangulate” the space between them—in other words, to provide a structuring for the comparison of thoughts and object/image. Anne Friedberg’s 2006 book *The Virtual Window* provides a coherent and historically far-reaching look at the shifting perspectives from framing thought in single, traditional forms (what she calls windows) toward multiple simultaneous windows of the virtual. She illuminates the shift in a successful Western format of the singly-framed concept while at the same time describing the expansion of our historical conceptualizations to include the virtual as well. The metaphor of a window is appropriate for the development in our processes of thinking about thinking and the language we employ to do so in terms of my current search for the parameters for a discussion platform for these ideas. Though I would not say that virtual imagery completely restructures our

concretely based architectonic thought processes, I would indeed agree that recent technological advances have nudged at the boundaries of the ways in which we frame our discussions about them, and in response we must continually investigate new ways to open windows to incorporate them.

So to bring the discussion back to where it began—the metaphor—we ought consider the possibility of a literal metaphor such as the Welcoming Hand of Singapore combining with a memorial metaphor of an event in the historical trajectory, expanded by a window into the generationally-relevant world of the virtual and technologically advanced as a metaphor for the metaphorical process itself. Sobolev lists conditions of metaphor as logical contradiction, conceptual incongruity, and nonexistence of a given entity in a given world or textual context, empirical falsity, banality or a true but pointless statement. (906) All of these conditions are met—and welcomed—when we begin to discuss how metaphorical processes might inform our engagement with memorials and with architectonic language and thought.

Examining architecture, memorial or otherwise, using metaphor allows us a glimpse into that which lies beyond both architecture and memory but at the same time encompasses them both. To this end, Tilley writes of materiality and meaning, describing the means by which this transverse process can best be

undertaken, that is, through the use of “carnal phenomenological ‘thick’ description” rather than a “thin, analytic account” (28). This view, however, privileges the sensory experience and risks reducing the process of architectural metaphor to that secondary and inferior position in which philosophy has often endeavored to place it. This is an unstable position unto itself, though, since there is certainly the element of physicality in architecture that is present in the same way in no other art or method of thinking. The structure must stand, after all, and at that most basic point, all critique becomes an esoteric (though worthwhile) matter. This attempt at thick description will follow in my next chapter, with an eye toward the limits of language and metaphor, thought and expression, but with the goal of attempting to arrive at a platform for working around/within/beyond them.

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## Part One: In Theory

The difficulty with metaphor, or indeed any inscription or description, is that by its very nature it includes presuppositions, cultural allusions, preconceived connections even in the simplest and most direct application of the form. If the representation is indirect, however, it could carry the risk of misinterpretation, repression or misuse by the observer. Between these two exists space for investigation of the underlying cultural structures and individual interpretations and the ways in which we analyze our own thoughts. Superficially this may appear to be no different from language use in general, but the complexities of language and meaning are taken a step further by applying or carving those words (or images) onto or into structures.



As a work of clearly but minimally inscribed architecture, the World War II Memorial in Washington DC illuminates and allows for analysis of the processes of construction of meaning and representation through overt but streamlined inscription and ornamentation, while in contrast the Holocaust Memorial Museum in the same city presents as an almost overdetermined example of ornamentation and inscription which may serve to hinder the meaning-making process. Though the processes of meaning-making and psychical representation among observers are certainly similar, in this chapter I contend that simplicity of inscription and imagery allows for a more complex characterization of the role of memorial architecture than does an overabundance of information, imagery and architectural representation. Direct representation in a more simplified form ultimately may provide a more solid framework, both philosophically and aesthetically, for the memorializing process and the making of individual meaning than a form that is overdetermined, overwhelming, and intentional in its structured disorientation.

This being said, however, the effect of disorientation and dismantling by Postmodern theory and the expansion and contestation of pluralist theories were a necessary development in the progression of our structuring thought leading us to this difficult-to-define contemporary cultural and historical moment. Yet again a version of the traditional dialectic is in process—the rigid structure and

formalizations of historical Modernism and the counterbalancing de-structuring of historical Postmodernism<sup>45</sup> allow for a synthesizing effect, not with the goal of providing a definitive answer or eliciting a revolutionary approach, but in terms of the creation of a new space for communication of ideas, allowing for a possible means of address for what Richard Rorty calls the problem of “overcoming authority without claiming authority” (105). I argue that we are experiencing a moment in which the patent structures of authority in Modernism has been overcome, thanks to the destabilizing interrogative processes of Postmodernism and pluralism, but at this moment no new cultural form of authority has taken shape. What an exciting time to be involved in the processes of thinking about our ways of thinking—we are not bound by the rigidity of Modernism, but we are not completely destabilized by the dismantling of Postmodernism. We are able to return to the stability of Modernism but it now appears in a newer, wiser and more relevant way, all because of the critique it bore. Though the current moment has been characterized as “contemporary” by some scholars (Smith, 683), the term

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<sup>45</sup> When I use the terms Modern and Postmodern in this document and particularly this section, I am speaking from a historicist perspective rather than one of architectural styles. I recognize the awkwardness and difficulties of this choice, but I use the terms throughout as centered around ways of structuring thought rather than ways of describing formal styles.

“neo-Modern” is probably more apt since it retains the connotation of a new version of an old theory, period or style<sup>46</sup>.

This is the claim that I intend to make, first by discussing the theoretical tenets of Postmodernism and examining to what degree the theory holds up in terms of architectural representation and processes of communication and derivation of cultural meaning, then by describing what appears to be a return to Modernism via a neo-Modernist perspective. The difficulty, of course, lies in being able to meaningfully distinguish neo-Modernism from its ancestor, but my contention is in keeping with Terry Smith’s assessment of neo-Modernism being “old modernism in new clothes” (685). At this moment, a heuristic definition is all that is available since culturally and intellectually we are still in the process of developing the parameters of both the theoretical and stylistic elements of neo-Modernism. For my purposes in this text, however, I will define the term as the return to the theoretical goals and ideals of Modernism, re-imagined and re-worked after experiencing and surviving the dismantling of Postmodern theory and the inclusive drive of pluralism. Once we made the step of removing the ground from under ourselves (what Derrida described as a continual process of

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<sup>46</sup> Of course, as soon as I say that, I realize the shortcomings of the term neo-Modern, a significant one of which is the idea that in other “neo-“ periods, the original one had come to a definite end. I do not think this (having ended) is the case with Modernism at all, but this term is the best one we have at this point.

gnawing away its own foundation), we had nowhere to go. The only direction was back to the foundation of Modernism, though it is certainly now less certain and we are less idealistic.

To be sure, Postmodern architectural theory does shake the foundations of Modern architecture's assumptions about structures and space as well as interrogate the process of memorializing through architecture and inscription. The very solidity and clarity of the Modernist memorial are held under necessary scrutiny, dismantled, and laid bare. The process was necessary to illuminate the ongoing reliance upon Modernist structures (altered though they may be), but here I would agree with Josh Toth, author of *The Passing of Postmodernism*, that if Postmodern theory had been carried out as an aesthetic endeavor, "...it would have ceased to move. It would have become absolutely silent." (179) The role of Postmodernism on our thought, then, might be analogous to a gesture, which is defined by Merriam-Webster as "a movement [usually of the hand or head] to express an idea or meaning"—and, importantly, not an idea or a meaning itself. The gestural quality of Postmodernist theory was valuable in its role as metaphor, but the practical application of the metaphor does not allow for resolution or forward progress into Postmodern architecture. In Part Two of this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which a neo-Modernist memorial allows for a different type of meaning-making than a Postmodernist one. This illustrates the

shortcomings of Postmodernist theory, not in intellectual importance but rather in practical application for a new trajectory of thought distinct from or beyond Modernism.

I would suggest that the process of Postmodern theoretical disassembly and critical unbuilding has revealed the strength of the (neo-)Modernist architectural memorial and, pertaining only to the role of the memorial in my discussion, does not hold up well when subject to its own interrogative processes. To what degree this holds true in other disciplines or arts is certainly debatable, but here I limit my discussion to only memorial architecture and our meaning-making processes associated with it. Though I am captivated by the inscriptionless Postmodern memorials such as the 2008 Pentagon Memorial for victims of the 9/11 acts, my aesthetic fondness for structures such as these are distinct from my discussion of the function of a memorial. On the other end of the spectrum of Postmodern memorial structures are those with an element of pastiche, a multiplicity of references and an amalgam of styles, such as the World Trade Center 9/11 Memorial (which recently experienced some considerable controversy over a commemorative cheese plate) or the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. I will suggest that the overrepresentation of the Postmodern memorial does not fare as well as the less ornamented neo-Modern one in terms of opportunity for meaning-making and the discussion and structuring of thought when held

under its own processes of scrutiny. It is not my intent to deliver a new critique of Postmodernism, to redefine or extend the definitions of neo-Modernism, or to posit some alternative means of memorializing, I only intend to raise questions about how neo-Modern and Postmodern forms and critiques apply to memorial architecture, both structurally and in terms of inscription, and offer my thoughts on those questions.<sup>47</sup> It seems that at this moment, a new path forward has not yet emerged, and, after grappling for purchase during Postmodernism and trying to gain a footing with the expansive scope of pluralism, we have had found ourselves returning to our Modernist roots to find a foundation. Though altered, it still exists as stable.

To this end, we might recall the problematic nature of metaphor and representation in memorial architecture, specifically that the processes lend themselves very easily to overdetermination. The old Mies Van der Rohe stock phrase “Less is more” deserves a fresh consideration—not from a singularly Postmodern standpoint, but rather from a temporal distance from what could be considered the period of “high Postmodernism” from the 1970’s through the 1990’s. Neo-Modernist memorial structures, based on Modern architectural

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<sup>47</sup> One of my recent student evaluations read: “I wish she would stop questioning everything and just give us definitions already.”

theory itself, have emerged more solid in the shadow of the dismantling of the very base structures of Modernism, something that arguably Postmodern theory was not able to demonstrate using its own processes. “Less is more” now has a patina which could only have developed after we have seen that too much can indeed be too much.

To delimit the bounds of Postmodern theory, it may be useful to consider as a basis Robert A. Stern’s three stylistic hallmarks of what he calls the “postmodern position”: contextualism, allusionism and ornamentalism (47). First, contextualism might be very simply defined in my own words and for this purpose as the relative belief (not to say truth) held based on circumstance which may or may not lead to closure or finality, allusionism can be viewed as the reference to an already-acknowledged artifact, and ornamentalism defined as the decorative (not necessary for function) embellishment of a structure (or thought).<sup>48</sup> Acknowledging that a thorough critique of these terms is beyond my scope here, the problematic nature of the “Postmodern position” exemplified in these three defining characteristics necessitates a brief discussion.

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<sup>48</sup> Though it is far from any relevance to my current discussion, I particularly like that “Ornamentalism” is the title of a 2002 book by historian David Cannadine suggesting the manner in which Britain viewed and justified its Empire.

First, contextualism, though certainly allowing for a multiplicity of meaning-makings because of the lack of certainty (or closure), presents the problem that if one adheres to a pattern of contextualizing and re-contextualizing, one may simultaneously be prohibited from the arrival at a conclusive individual meaning. Philosopher Keith DeRose posits a tiered approach to the dilemma of arriving at acceptable levels of knowledge or closure—such as the old question as to how we decide whether we have hands or not—depending on whether the context or knower is “skeptical” or “ordinary.” I feel, however, for my purposes that this distinction will not suffice because my objective is to present a platform of discussion wherein “ordinary” and “skeptical” may coexist and co-operate. To make a distinction between the two is recontextualizing the definition of contextualizing.

Here I think of the word “focus,” which in its scientific definition denotes a place from which rays converge or diverge to reflect an image or the point from which rays appear to proceed and which in its common usage suggests the main purpose or the center of an activity (OED.com). Both of these definitions of the word reveal the difficulty of maintaining an overabundant position and truly acknowledging a pluralistic viewpoint while effectively maintaining a clear platform for discussion—to incorporate a multiplicity of perspectives, to pan out to the larger image, means to sacrifice some precision and detail within the image



reflected, in other words, to lose focus. The attention to empirical fact that can be the focus of an investigation, if not entirely lost, could become diluted in what could be considered a parallel to a less clearly delineated drive for inclusion, but it can also open up possibilities for expansion, or as Code discusses, the choosing of “points of contestation” of the dominant cultural perspective through which parameters could be expanded and challenged.

In order to counterbalance the shortcomings of the traditional Western canon, we must respectfully acknowledge a pluralistic view on thought and existence, while at the same time recognizing that doing so will involve some measure of exclusion. Perhaps it is a necessary (or even unavoidable) evil, but one which is employed by pluralist scholars as well. *Black Feminist Thought* necessarily excludes a focus on the religious view of Asian males, not to its detriment, but to further its drive for specificity and clarification of one of many positions within an acknowledged global, multicultural and multiperspectival context. Because the canonical discussion has traditionally centered on Western white males is not justification for the assumption that it continues to signify oppression, repression or cultural hegemony now that culturally we openly recognize the value and existence of a multiplicity of alternate perspectives. What contemporary (that is, post-Postmodern and -pluralist) questions about defining our current position may now allow room for is a partial rehabilitation of the canonical Western

viewpoint—no longer as the dominant perspective, but as only one perspective in a diverse field, no better or worse than any other, no more or less exclusionary than any other in a manner not dissimilar to what I am suggesting has occurred with our partial, informed return to structures of Modernism to describe our current situation—wiser, shaken, more inclusive, with its limitations exposed, and the better for it.

This is not to say, however, that space does not exist for other perspectives or that they are in any way to be minimized. In fact, as I suggested throughout this document, the creation of space or of a platform from which multiple perspectives can be addressed is a necessity of the very position in which we find ourselves as scholars attempting to categorize the current historical moment. While I would agree with Lugones that the conception of the vantage point assumes unity, I would disagree that this unity necessarily derives from a mechanism of control by a dominant traditionally-male perspective (Purity, 465), at least at the contemporary cultural moment. Instead, I would argue that a true, over-arching vantage point is as impossible a construct as an all-inclusive perspective, and that the unities—plural—are temporary, variable and multiple. There are only contingent vantage points, agreed-upon by those who identify with a particular group, or negotiated among different positions. To say that a single vantage point exists (and that it can still be attributed to the Western white male

perspective) is simplifying the issue in a way that I feel it can no longer be simplified.

An acknowledged difficulty of including multiple perspectives, however, is the risk of placing them uninvestigated in what become dominant perspectives of their own parallel to the traditional one of the Western white male. Medina addresses this issue throughout *The Epistemology of Resistance* and suggests what he terms a “polyphonic contextualism” that encourages the development of the conditions under which “contestatory practices of social commentary” can occur and flourish (265). The self-reflective extension of critique and contestation of inclusion *during* the process of inclusion demonstrates what I feel to be a marker of transition in the contemporary period, informed by pluralist thought, away from the limitations of Postmodernism toward whatever this period may be named, neo-Modern or otherwise. Mindful inclusion that is self-reflective and open to the same processes of contestation applied to traditional dominant perspectives offers a practical guideline for ways in which perspectives from the margins can both be included but simultaneously interrogated for instances of their own underlying structures of dominance.

The other two qualities of the Postmodern position, allusionism and ornamentation, deserve brief mention as well, though they do not differ

significantly from similar processes in Modernism. Allusionism, I might suggest, is a catchy new word for the age-old literary and historical processes of making analogies and references to the past. This term, now especially popular in film studies, for the purposes of architecture does not signify a meaningful departure from the common process of referring to the past through reintroduction of iconic elements of former styles or eras. From a literary and linguistic standpoint, however, it is important to again note the role allusion plays in metaphor and our representation of memory. Ornamentation, on the other hand, has been discussed from its absence—or better said, restriction—in Modern architecture, but when we consider the role of ornamentation for its own sake, represented by pastiche, intermingling of design elements from various past eras, and combination of new, unrelated elements, the process reveals itself as one more complication that may result in hindering rather than expanding the parameters for our thought and our engagement with memory and meaning-making. The presence of an overabundance of options, positions or ornaments is just as surely a process of erasure, only the form of erasure is through an ever-expanding desire for inclusion, impossible as it is to achieve completely, which may result in a less clear path toward knowledge.

The role of the Holocaust memorial in our cultural awareness, which James E. Young calls *Wiedergutmachung*<sup>49</sup>, stands almost as a cultural expectation. Arguably, we observe Holocaust memorials to derive a sense of comfort or healing from them, even more so than in the case of a traditional memorial. There is a degree to which Badiou's statement that, "Death alone is proof of life. Finitude alone is proof of the transcendental constitution of experience" (268), without introducing, as he does, the role of God in this observation, is particularly applicable in the case of a Holocaust memorial. Certainly part of its function is to instruct and to warn, but undeniably an undercurrent of resilience and survival exists in every exhibit, traumatized and unheroic though it may be depending on the individual survivor. But this undercurrent applies not only in terms of those who actually survived, but I would suggest also and particularly in terms of the observer—who did not experience the event—in that the structure affirms the observer's own existence by reminding us of the survival of others.

Though James Ingo Freed, the designer of the Holocaust Memorial Museum, does not specifically claim to be a Postmodernist, his perspective on the purpose of his structure would seem to be in line with Lyotard's assessment of

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<sup>49</sup> Again, one has to love the German expression. In English we have no word that simply says "making-good-again."

Postmodernism in that it "...doesn't seem committed to the same issue of founding in general [as Modernism does]. The job of establishing a foundation—that of philosophy—is first of all considered to be useless and secondly hopeless, that is, neither competitive nor performative." (190) Though Lyotard here is discussing theory in general, not specifically architecture, the message here is certainly analogous. I hope to illustrate throughout this chapter the ways in which Postmodern theory remains true to its ideals but the manner in which the theory ultimately fails to allow itself adequate room to be translated into architecture. In other words, the critiques suggested by Postmodernist and pluralist theory reveal that architecture itself independent of theory cannot exist without a foundation, and that in answer to those critiques, philosophy is now situated at a point of redefinition from which the question becomes how thought might or could further develop in the absence of an established foundation. A movement towards inclusion still creates exclusions if its own, however, in much the same way that Postmodern theory excludes its application by critically undoing the circumstances under which it could be subject to its own critique. As Medina notes, the critical factors in our current pluralist position are self-knowledge and awareness of others' positions in an intersection of what he terms a "knowledge of social contextuality" (134). Despite the inclusion of others' perspectives, the social contextuality of which he speaks is still a version (although fluid,

conditional and much more informed) of a foundation, and it still requires the exclusion of some perspectives in the definition of its parameters. The contextuality and the knowledge stemming from it are only possible given a certain set of social and cultural boundaries from which to analyze thought. In fact, Medina points out the necessity that “subjects are unimpeded in their processes of knowledge acquisition” (169) in order to fully employ his thesis of cognitive minimums—in other words, to achieve self-knowledge and incorporate the knowledge of others’ perspectives requires freedom from oppression or domination by a cultural force not one’s own. Though certainly he is speaking of the traditional, White-male dominant culture, and the idea of achieving knowledge through an unimpeded process is appealing, the difficulty of that situation is that in a world after post-pluralist critique, the nature of an “unimpeded process” itself is likely as unachievable as a structure that is held up by its own ruin, to paraphrase Derrida. Opposition and resistance are only possible when there is a force to be opposed or resisted, and, while I agree with Medina that resistance is a means for the marginalized to achieve greater knowledge, the epistemology of resistance is also an impediment to the knowledge acquisition of those who are marginalized in other ways and especially those who either choose not to resist or are not aware of or able to articulate the extent of their own oppression.

## **Part Two:**

### **Neo-Modernist (or neo-Fascist?): The World War II Memorial**

The World War II Memorial in Washington DC, though not completed until 2004, stands as a neo-Modernist monument to those who fought in and contributed to the effort of the quintessential conflict of the Modern era. The Greatest Generation, the defining event of the Twentieth Century, the pinnacle of inhumanity, all of these descriptors contain within them, but arguably do not overstate, the position of WWII in our cultural memory as the culmination of the unholy alliance of mechanization, dehumanization and modernity. Clear heroes are outlined against unapologetic demons, and the easily defined nature of the conflict into good and evil allow our perspective as Americans to become one of benevolent dominance and moral correctness. Though admittedly this position is easily questioned regarding its simplistic assessment of truth, and while it certainly directs attention away from many well-documented negative issues about American involvement in WWII, this Memorial concretely and unequivocally represents the dominance and superiority of the prevailing American version (or cultural experience) of the event through its military, and to a lesser degree civilian, achievement. The simplicity of the outer structure as well as the rather minimal use of traditional ornamentation underscore and bring into



sharp focus the single purpose of the memorial: to celebrate victory. In fact, on the floor of each of the northern and southern pavilions is inscribed “Victory on land. Victory at sea. Victory in the air.” There is no room for misinterpretation; American dominance in the event is undeniable.

This unwavering positioning of unity and commonality, heavy-handed as it may appear, could in essence serve as the defining strength of the memorial by almost paradoxically allowing more possibilities for the motivated observer to arrive at his own meaning. With a firm foundation of clear representation and the ideal, the observer might more freely construct his own thoughts and process of memorialization relying on, and in so doing allowing room for contrast to, or as Medina says “contestation of,” the strong framing of the message. I am suggesting here and throughout that the questioning and analytic process has more room for growth in a situation with an external restriction of choices rather than an abundance of them. A 2004 book (and now a TED talk) by Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*, outlines this process. Though Schwartz discusses the phenomenon from a business/economic or consumerist standpoint, his basic thesis could easily be applied to the way in which we engage with and make meaning from memorial architecture, and in turn how those processes both reflect and restrict our approaches to and expressions of thought. When one is faced with too many possibilities, Schwartz contends, one encounters what he calls “choice

paralysis," a loss of the ability to identify what is desirable. (Here we can look back to Freud's assertion that the object desired is not the focus so much as the experiencing of the desire itself.) Often the result, again here with consumer purchases, is inaction, but the same could be said of too many choices—or too little restriction—when we engage with architecture and the means of structuring our own thought accordingly. The mechanisms at work are psychologically relevant in an engagement of neo-Modern and Postmodern aesthetic styles of memorialization—when faced with too much possibility, the individual must streamline or reduce, whereas when presented with a restriction of choice (or in this case, what I might call instead an abundance of certainty), the individual is able to expand or develop, both of which allow for more creative meaning-making and thought.<sup>50</sup> Rather than infinite possibility, well-defined restriction has been shown to be the more effective structure for the exploration and development of our thought. We have returned to some familiar forms of Modernism, though they may present themselves with new layers of clothing.

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<sup>50</sup> One could also argue here, as many former Catholics I know often say, that this is similar to being exposed to formalized religion as a child. Cadge and Davidman also write of this occurrence in an article on assimilation and acceptance in those raised as Buddhists and Jews. It can be a worthwhile experience because it gives one a set dogma against which to push back by exploring one's own perspectives and allows for a firm foundation with which one can disagree.

The World War II Memorial presents a clear message of triumph and exhibits a familiar, comforting structure for the viewer—symmetrical pillars, perfectly aligned ornaments, and short, clear inscriptions, all in capital letters—organized in a high Modernist arrangement of a traditional memorial (which TIME magazine even criticized for appearing “too fascist”). The use of stone and symmetry do certainly reference the neo-classical style of Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany, but the structure, perhaps because of its very “fascistic” style, allows for a direct and immediate corralling and containment of memory into the era and a glorifying commemoration of a defining event in American history. As the National Park Service website summarizes, “Above all, the memorial stands as an important symbol of American national unity, a timeless reminder of the moral strength and awesome power that can flow when a free people are at once united and bonded together in a common and just cause.” ([www.wwiimemorial.com](http://www.wwiimemorial.com)) Nuance and ambiguity have little place in this memorial. Rowlands observes that “... one of the features of nationalist war memorials has been their capacity to turn traumatic individual deaths into acts of national celebration and heroic assertions of collective value. Freud, writing on the death instinct, was this transition from negativity to positivity as a fundamental feature of mourning” (130), and the World War II Memorial certainly fulfills this function. The individual death is subsumed under the national effort

and the collective victory, and the focus of the memorial is the achievement of the nation rather than the individual effort. This stands in stark contrast to the Vietnam Memorial with its inscribed individual names, of course, but perhaps in its generality becomes more conducive to meaning-making processes because of the focus on victory and sacrifice on a national scale rather than personal loss.

These functions were the focus of the World War II Memorial's architect and designer, Friedrich St Florian. A native Austrian who was 12 years old at the end of World War II<sup>51</sup>, St Florian had personal memories of the war, but since the majority of his life has been lived in the United States, he identifies with being an American. He has been at the Rhode Island School of Design for decades—in fact, he states that he considers his career to be a marriage of both designing and teaching architecture (*Builders*)—as well as maintaining his own architectural design group. Both the neo-classical “fascistic” architecture of his youth and his identification with American victory and dominance on the world stage are clearly visible in his design and translate well to observers and the Battle Monuments Commission as well. The placement of a new monument along the Mall was a contentious issue, with some opposition feeling that any new construction would

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<sup>51</sup> He tells of his parents being strongly opposed to the Nazi regime, but when Americans rolled through Austria, St Florian recalls being scolded by his mother for admiring the Army's Jeeps.

minimize the impact of the existing presidential monuments, but, as St. Florian pointed out in an interview, the McMillan Plan of 1902 sought to retain the spirit of L'Enfant and Washington's original design from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, combining "simplicity with dignity," but at the same time endeavoring to allow for the development of future monuments within the Mall area (Cornell). When designing the World War II Memorial, St Florian chose to lower rather than raise the memorial plaza so that the view between the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials would not be obstructed and reduce some of the grounds for opposition while allowing the monument to maintain both its own and the Mall's planned structural integrity.

The goals of this memorial, according to St. Florian, were to evoke the memory of WWII and simultaneously to act as a framing device for the two presidential monuments (*American Builders Quarterly*). His expectation was that visitors would not only think about World War II, but also about the two great presidents whose monuments flank the WWII Memorial in order to incorporate a sense of America's history before the Twentieth Century as well. To be sure, because his client was the American Battle Monument Commission (with many

other government agencies putting their two cents in too)<sup>52</sup>, St. Florian's original design underwent some modification before it was built. Namely, an underground museum (here I think of the one at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin) and the plan of having "decapitated" columns to represent lives cut short in war were jettisoned from the original design. Added to the structure as enhancement in the view of the Commission were the 4000 gold stars onto what was intended to be an unadorned commemorative wall. The architect did not ultimately object to the modifications, stating "In the end, I do not feel it has been compromised; in many ways it is a better memorial," he said. "Although it's different, and I liked the original design, it fulfills what I perceived in the beginning. It fulfills the objective. I am very happy." (*Times*, "Academic Touches the Masses")

Located along the National Mall in Washington DC, a short walk from the Jefferson Memorial at one end of the reflecting pool and opposing the Lincoln Memorial at the other, the National World War II Memorial stands in an open oval arrangement with a shallow pool and fountain at its center. As one approaches from the Mall, the Memorial's pillars denote its boundaries with the tallest (43-foot

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<sup>52</sup> A case even rose to the level of the Supreme Court in protest of the design, but the Court decided not to hear it, and a Congressional measure was passed which prohibited further legal actions against the memorial.

high) pillars representing the Atlantic and Pacific theaters at the north and south ends of the structure. The 56 smaller (17-foot high) pillars, one for each state, territory, and the District of Columbia, form an oval outward from the anchors of the main pillars, and are arranged such that when one approaches from the east or west, the space between them provides for an open gate, a clear path. Approaching from the east, directly from the Jefferson Memorial, one sees that the WWII Memorial perfectly frames the Lincoln Memorial down the length of the reflecting pool. A short series of three staircases leads the visitor up to the structure itself through a vast open entryway<sup>53</sup>. Ringed by the 56 stone pillars with the taller pavilions at each end, the interior space is flat to the ground and curvilinear in layout, and the water of the fountain in the Reflecting Pool sprays in short but symmetrical arcs at perfectly spaced intervals with two higher fountains appearing parallel to the northern and southern pavilions. At the west stands a curved memorial wall, Freedom Wall, adorned with 4048 simple gold stars to commemorate those who lost their lives in the war.

The pavilions on either end stand in symmetry to one another, and under the granite shell each has four bronze columns that support four bronze eagles

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<sup>53</sup> Of course, wheelchair access is available via gradually elevated sidewalks. These side gates are also alternate entry points for anyone, though the overall effect is diminished somewhat.

holding a single victory laurel which wraps around the high interior. Each of the four facades of both pavilions simply has the word “Atlantic” or “Pacific” inscribed upon it in widely-spaced capital letters. On the floor of each pavilion (along with the victory inscription noted earlier) is engraved an image of the victory medal and simply the years 1941-1945. These pavilions are flanked on the interior of the memorial by shorter walls upon which the major battle sites of each theater are listed. The shorter walls curve to encompass a walkway along which visitors may slowly ascend from the entry level of the fountain to the elevated pavilions on each end, passing state pillars along each side.

The 56 pillars themselves are also made of granite, with the name of a state or territory simply inscribed in capital letters, and they are arranged by order of entry into the Union, alternating from north to south<sup>54</sup>. The pillars have bronze forms of oak or wheat wreaths symbolizing victory and are united by a bronze rope connecting them. Since one naturally gravitates to the state with which he has some connection, each visitor is able to achieve a personal relevance with that single geographical reference. The foundation is solid, the memory is fluid. Like the pavilions, each pillar has open space, a narrow vertical opening through which

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<sup>54</sup> This north-south alternation is still somewhat baffling to me. Though date of entry into the union is a reasonable method for arrangement, the alternation seems to complicate the matter with little to gain in terms of overall meaning.



light passes when one views the pillar straight-on. From an angle, however, the pillars appear to be solid granite, almost elongated and narrowed versions of gravestones. The slits in each, however, contribute to the feeling of expanse and grandeur rather than making the visitor feel encircled or trapped, and it is at the bottom of each slit, ranging from a few feet below to a few feet above eye level, that the name of the state is engraved. As the visitor walks down the slight incline from each pavilion (where the pillars' inscriptions are lowest) he must continually raise his eyes toward the inscriptions on each successive pillar, each of which is elevated by a slightly higher base as the walkway angles down toward the plaza and fountains. At the highest, the inscriptions are still easily readable, however, at just a few feet above eye level, and the slow elevation of the head to continue along the walkway results in a subtle, almost unconscious gesture of reverence.

The west end of the memorial is Freedom Wall, a 9-foot high by 84-foot long concave structure upon which are uniformly arranged 4000 gold stars commemorating the over 400,000 Americans who lost their lives during the war. The gold stars, of course, reference the common wartime practice of hanging a small star in the window of a household which was home to a soldier. Blue stars indicated an active duty serviceman while a gold star indicated that the soldier from that household had lost his life in the war. Each of these 4000 stars along Freedom Wall represents approximately 1000 dead servicemen in an overtly

anonymous yet numerically powerful representation. A low granite runner stands before the half-circle created by the concave wall, and upon this running wall is inscribed, again in all capital letters, “Here we mark the price of freedom.” The price is marked as a collective rather than a personal one.

Other areas of the memorial offer various inscriptions—quotes by Generals Eisenhower, MacArthur and Marshall as well as Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, among others—that are succinct (one is tempted to say lapidary), straightforward, and unequivocal. One or two of the quotes reference the role of women in the war effort while another mentions contributions of those on the home front,<sup>55</sup> but primarily the focus remains on struggle, sacrifice and victory. Those from President Truman are most clearly of a commemorative nature, since they were made after the war and focus on heroism and sacrifice, while some of those by the Generals reflect statements made while the war was still in progress as well<sup>56</sup>. The quotes from the Generals are perhaps the most moving, as they reference the active element of participation in the event, and evoke the most

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<sup>55</sup> Personally, and here I reveal my often-hidden traditional side, I am troubled by the drive toward “inclusivity” in a war memorial. While I would not deny the impact of those back home who lent their support to the war effort, I feel that the heft of the memorial is somewhat diluted by their inclusion. As someone who would never serve in the military, I do not think I deserve the same recognition as those who do.

<sup>56</sup> A complete listing of these (and all) inscriptions on this memorial is available at [www.wwiimemorial.com](http://www.wwiimemorial.com).

emotional response in terms of the focus on American achievement and victory. My favorite is that of General George C. Marshall which reads: "We are determined that before the sun sets on this terrible struggle our flag will be recognized throughout the world as a symbol of freedom on the one hand and of overwhelming force on the other." The appeal of this statement is its calmly ominous, utterly determined approach toward unequivocal victory. It is simultaneously terrifying and reassuring. In 1942 when the statement was made, US involvement was at only one quarter to one third of the duration of its overall wartime participation, yet the fixity of purpose and the foreboding tone are particularly effective in encapsulating the intent of the memorial and in clearly delineating the position our involvement in World War II would come to play in our cultural heritage. In the same way, all of the inscriptions are concise, clear, and unwavering in tone and content while they suggest nothing short of total military and moral victory. In that way they both completely support and extend beyond the materials, arrangement and form of the memorial structure itself.

There were of course controversies surrounding the inscriptions, since historical accuracy and relevance are so closely associated with the process of choosing words for memorialization, and strangely the two most well-known surrounding this memorial are religious in nature. One example of this is the alleged omission of the phrase "so help us God" in a quote from a speech given by

Franklin D. Roosevelt on December 8, 1941 in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The American Battle Monuments Commission and the World War II Memorial Commission have taken great pains to address this allegation, actually publishing the entirety of President Roosevelt's speech on the National Parks website. The speech reveals that the original speech actually did not contain the phrase at all, so it could hardly have been omitted from the memorial. More recently, controversy arose from an allegation that President Obama refused to allow a prayer to be read at the Memorial in 2011, again not borne out by factual evidence. In a secular controversy, access to the Memorial was temporarily blocked in October 2013 as part of negotiations in the government shutdown, angering some veterans and giving conservatives some fodder for dissent. Again, these controversies are questions of a current-day political nature rather than one which questions the direct applicability of the memorial to processes of commemoration of those who died in World War II.

As mentioned above, other controversies arose around the Memorial, but they were primarily those of placement along the Mall<sup>57</sup> rather than the intent of the memorial. Certainly there were complaints about the Albert Speer-like style

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<sup>57</sup> There was a movement in the late 1990's through around 2000 called "Save the Mall" which took issue with the memorial allegedly defacing the pristine neo-Colonial promenade of the Mall.

of the memorial (which St. Florian felt could perhaps have been a trumped-up personal slight against him as an Austrian) but otherwise, the cultural controversies were less related overall to its intended purpose or message than to opposition to its location and form. The design was challenged by critics as being too bland or traditional, exemplified by a New York Times review of the structure which read: "... the design of the National World War II Memorial diminishes the substance of its architectural context. The design does not dare to know. It is, instead, a shrine to the idea of not knowing or, more precisely, of forgetting. It erases the historical relationship of World War II to ourselves. It puts sentiment in the place where knowledge ought to be." ("Appraisal") While I would agree that there is little architecturally revolutionary in this design, I would not agree that its form translates into a "shrine to not knowing" for the reasons I have incorporated into this entire project—the knowing (which I would suggest is more appropriately called "thinking") arises as a result of the definitive message of what is to be thought about (World War II) and the clear presentation of the parameters within which it can be discussed (the architectural form). In my view, it is indeed a clear shrine to knowing (thinking) in that it unequivocally, if predictably, illustrates the subject and the message, making the process of forgetting utterly impossible for the reasons outlined in previous chapters. Memorializing as a process is antithetical to the process of forgetting an event, and a clear message

allows for the proliferation of engagement with individual memory and meaning-making<sup>58</sup>. The critic's comment that the memorial "...represents our yearning for the timeless and eternal to distract us from the relative and the complex" ("Appraisal") is as reductive, simplistic and unimaginative as it alleges the Memorial to be. The relative and complex are best afforded room for discovery and discussion when there is a firm sense of the timeless and eternal (or what I have been calling a firm foundation) from which to extend thought.

To offer an example, the ascending orientation of the pillars and the rigid symmetry of the pavilions for the Atlantic and Pacific Theaters remind one of almost literal translation of architecture in modernity, one which could be described, as Hornstein does, as an 'architecture of the heart': "[an] architecture of memory and imagination that is not a physical and functional object in space, fixed in a geographic location. Instead...there is an architectural construction recorded daily by each of us as we imagine the world not before our eyes" (15). The structure, then, is allowing for an imaginative or creative effort of the mind at least as much as the physical experience of the body, and, though Hornstein

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<sup>58</sup> This reminds me of the film "Forgiving Dr Mengele," wherein local Holocaust survivor Eva Moses Kor is challenged by other survivors because of her policy of forgiveness toward the Nazis and all Germans. They contend that by forgiving, she is allowing forgetting to happen. She most strenuously objects, and I am with her on that.

suggests that it is variable according to the time and the viewer, the underlying assumption is that the goal is not only recognizable but also attainable by an observer. The ideas behind this World War II memorial are not only to convey the American moral and military victory at the time and places of the event but also to extend the relevance of that message into the present. In *The Postmodern Continuum*, Robert A Stern comments that, “for the Anglo-American, [modern] architecture had to be much more than the *Bauen* believed by Mies: architecture had to transcend materiality to become a symbolic-cultural act.” (54) The effect of the World War II Memorial is certainly one which transcends materiality and reaches for a noble and symbolic effect.<sup>59</sup> It is this mindset that justifies my use of the WWII Memorial as an example of modern architecture—stylistically, and more importantly in its intent, the piece reflects our desire for purpose and clarity through an aesthetic process of simplification and restriction.

At this point, a brief mention of overarching themes of Modern architecture might be introduced and applied to the World War II Memorial in order to suggest a few ways in which meaning making might actually flourish in the presence of

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<sup>59</sup> Here I specifically choose the word “noble” because of an inscription on Frank Lloyd Wright’s Blue Sky Mausoleum: “... the whole could not fail of noble effect.” The concept of “noble” in design is ever-present in Modern architecture and is an aspiration which I am sad to see Postmodernism dismantle. Surely something must retain its noble status even in the face of relentless critique.

symmetry of form and fixedness of principle rather than an abundance of possibility. Here I would agree with Lyotard that: "Modernity is a state of mind, rather than a period or an epoch. The modern turn is ancient. ... Modernity started with an extension of the Christian vision in which there was a general purposiveness or finality polarizing the course of the world. *A horizon was proposed...*" (188, italics mine). This "horizon" of modernity is yet another way to characterize the ground, or the foundation, that I have throughout suggested is always necessary in order for thought to occur. This horizon certainly has been interrogated and critiqued by postmodern and pluralist theory, yet I would contend that this horizon, once proposed, cannot be erased or dismantled entirely. In other words, using a construct of postmodernist and pluralist thought to reveal its own limitation, a trace of horizons-having-existed will continue to be present even if we were to contend that the horizon no longer exists. That it was proposed disallows the expression of a situation of "post-horizon" thought without simultaneously acknowledging the onetime presence of the horizon. Philosophically the horizon can be limited to discussions of truth, knowledge, reality and humanity, but the existence (or having-existed) of the horizon of Modernity does shape and circumscribe subsequent thought in what could be considered a historical process intrinsic to its development and progression. In other words, once we have experienced a culture in which a horizon was



proposed, we are unable to discard that imagery or framework for our thoughts. Whether we try to outrun or out-theorize the need for horizons, our thinking has been structured around their presence in what may be a similar process to the manner in which thought is structured around architectural language as well. We can recognize them as limitations and challenge ourselves to work around them in a process akin to the incorporation of pluralist perspectives.

To summarize modern architectural theory in a few (or a few thousand) pages is clearly an impossible task, so rather than attempting to do this, and acknowledging the shortcomings of this decision from the start, I have chosen a pair of statements by modern architects that will allow my discussion to reflect the spirit and motivation of the theory without becoming a laborious literature review on the subject. Again, this will serve my purposes of providing a platform for discussion much better in that representative statements reflecting theoretical assumptions are more approachable and accessible to the non-specialist, even and especially to the non-academic, in order to facilitate a conversation about the possibilities for meaning-making through architectonic structures and language.

At its simplest, the Modernist architectural drive is well summarized by Le Corbusier's famous statement, "To create architecture is to put in order. Put what in order? Function and objects." If we return to the World War II Memorial in

light of this comment, it becomes immediately apparent that the structure fills this most basic criterion of the purpose of Modern architecture from a Modernist perspective—function and objects are indeed put in order. The primary function is, of course, the memorializing of a large-scale American sacrifice and clear victory during the war, and this function is made unequivocally manifest in numerous structural elements throughout. The perfectly symmetrical pavilions and pillars of granite reference the unwavering solidity of the American endeavor and the stability of our democracy, the shallow pool with fountains represents the life-giving sustenance and eternal renewal of the American victory and moral superiority (as it is presented—and here I am not debating the truth of that, only acknowledging the going cultural story), and the open oval arrangement with pavilions and pillars suggest a position of America as a protector, but one with open elements suggesting that this protection does not come through force or coercion, but rather through a benevolent desire to bring others into the fold.<sup>60</sup>

A secondary function would, of course, be the historical relevance of American participation in World War II. Indeed, even schoolchildren have a basic familiarity with the conflict, the American victory (cultural knowledge that the

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<sup>60</sup> Not that I would personally agree with any of this, of course, but one must admit that the intended message is on-point, no matter one's moral or political feelings about American involvement in WWII or feelings about patriotism, the military or politics in general.

victory was achieved by the Allies together might be too much to assume here), and the Greatest Generation, if not in name than at least in international status. We only need consider our ongoing reluctance to admit our much-challenged and ever-decreasing influence on a global scale to realize that in many ways our cultural self-identification is still tied to the period of and immediately after World War II. We as Americans want to identify with the moral and military victory, the undeniable rightness of the war against fascism, and the resolute mindset of the generals and presidents quoted along the walls of the memorial. The Modernist ideals of transcendence and purpose are again brought into concrete form in the solid, symmetrical, focused and unambiguous memorial. The function of this memorial is just as clear as its form. In fact, St. Florian states that in his view architecture is "...expected to reach beyond utilitarian considerations and stand as an artistic statement of timeless value." (stflorian.com)

The second element that should be put in order according to Le Corbusier's statement is "objects." Without going too deeply beyond reiterating that for the purposes of my discussion architecture does not assert agency outside of the individual human engagement with it, I would suggest that the objects in this structure are nonetheless both the visitors and the ornamentation. The visitor is an object in my view only in the sense that the design of the memorial—which is far different from saying the memorial itself, since the design ultimately is

attributable to a human agent—necessarily limits and directs the visitor within the structure’s framework. I openly acknowledge that we are at present struggling to define our after-Postmodern, after-pluralism selves and that a part of that is the suggestion of the post-human. However, unless we somehow manage to escape the parameters of our own humanity, it is my assessment that these same binding parameters of humanness (and those of architectural language and architecture itself) can be considered the stable basis for the fruitful grounding of thought. I would certainly disagree with Baudrillard in his dramatically-posed view that humanity is a “spongy referent...[ready] to collapse under its own weight” (*Shadow*, 47), and would instead suggest that humans, though shaken, dismantled and deconstructed, have re-emerged intact as structures and remained in essence bound by their own humanity in a way that Modernism (perhaps too strongly) championed and Postmodernism (perhaps too strongly) challenged.

So the human as a qualified object—an objectivity that comes at the hands of the architect, not the structure—certainly falls within Corbusier’s orderly parameters for architecture. The design of the World War II Memorial effectively corrals the visitor, though he has choices of entry points and directions to walk within its confines, in its protective metaphorical embrace and in so doing affords room for him to have a clear understanding of the event and the participants memorialized. Modern architecture has what I might describe as an undeniable

“well, there it is” quality<sup>61</sup>, in that the structures are straightforward in form, clear in intent, unambiguous in purpose. One need not agree with the message, of course, but the message is undeniably present and thus its presence presents possibilities for understanding and contestation. The effect of walking within the oval memorial is that of protection without confinement<sup>62</sup>, for example spaces between and within the pillars allow for an openness to nature but the pillars themselves along with the pavilions and commemorative wall serve to provide a sense of enclosure in a historical and cultural moment of greatness. At the same time, the visitor experiences a sense of freedom in that there is no specific order or guided path to take, one is free to examine the memorial from any angle and begin at any area, and the memorial is of such a large scale that even on a busy summer weekend (like during my visit) the visitor is afforded plenty of room to move about and regard the structure in relative solitude. My favorite example of ordering of human “objects” is the explicit prohibition from entering the pool, even with one’s feet, even on the hottest summer day. Though this is objectionable in terms of personal comfort, the underlying orderliness for the sake of aesthetics

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<sup>61</sup> In contrast to what I might describe as often postmodern architecture’s eliciting of a “What *is* that?” response.

<sup>62</sup> St. Florian said his only regret after the project was completed was not having an open passage or walkway from the Western side of the Memorial.

(in contrast to, say, a museum which forbids interaction with art that could be damaged in the process) is a manifestation of the goals Modern architecture as well. It is not, however, an action of the work of architecture at all upon the visitor (the structure would allow for anyone to just jump right in) but rather a manifestation of human rules upon each other.

The other form of Corbusier's object-put-in-order would be what I consider the "adornments" of the Memorial—and with the caveat that Modern architecture did look to reduce ornamentation overall, but in this memorial, the adornments are symbolic, streamlined and on-message<sup>63</sup>. Though these would also include the oak and wheat bronze wreaths, the bronze eagles and victory laurel, and the forms of the fountain and the green space along the staircases, I will only include the gold stars and the style of inscriptions as examples here. The inscriptions, all entirely related to the victory of the United States during the war, are carved into the granite in regular intervals, in all capital letters, in strict keeping with the intent of the memorial. Their message as metaphor has been discussed, but stylistically and aesthetically, their presence serves to "ornament" the memorial in a functional

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<sup>63</sup> Even Frank Lloyd Wright's Blue Sky Mausoleum, an undeniably sparse Modern memorial, nonetheless has an inscription and a slight decorative carving of the granite in the pillar. I am not echoing Adolf Loos that ornamentation is criminal, nor would I say it is prohibited in Modern architecture, only that it—not surprisingly—serves a function. Even the two faux-graffiti "Kilroy was here" images on the WWII Memorial are with clear intentionality.

and precise manner. Their spacing, their brevity, their arrangement all speak to the strict orderliness of functional representation in Modern architecture regarding the memorializing process. Similarly, the 4048 gold stars are perfectly plotted on the commemorative wall, signifying a unity of purpose and an equality among individuals, but also through the regularity of their placement allowing for a purposeful image that acknowledges the magnitude of American losses during the war (though, to be sure, they were a fraction of those in Europe) without becoming overburdened by specificity or detail.

The process of “putting into order” is effective in memorialization in that the design of the memorial clearly identifies the purpose, the event, those who are to be remembered, and the manner in which they are to be remembered. It stratifies the event in terms of American history and national image and provides the observer the intended and unmistakable cultural message. This is certainly not to say, however, that there is no room afforded for critical thinking about the memorial, rather, the opposite is likely the case—that having a clear message provides a space more conducive to exploratory thought and meaning-making processes than an ambiguous, less-defined message.

The design of this memorial reflects the spirit of the second quote which I feel exemplifies the drive of Modern architecture, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s

statement that, "Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space." This observation is at its surface easily applicable to the intended message of the World War II Memorial by even the most casual observer—the position of America mid-century, victorious, morally upright, militarily powerful and benevolent, achieved through will and strength. One need have no familiarity with architectural theory to conceptualize the message, nor is one necessarily required to have much knowledge about the event itself to ascertain the intended meaning of the structure. Part of the success of this memorial (and I would argue Modern architecture in general, for the purposes of my discussion regarding the architectonic foundations of language and thought) is the undercurrent of clarity and forthrightness of the message that is to be conveyed. Modern architecture effectively adheres to a set of its own regular rules and objectives—it is practically a given that, beginning with the manifestos at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the primary goals of Modern architecture are the achievement of transcendence, function, and simplicity. Friedrich St. Florian understood these goals and incorporated them into his structure: "The most important obligation for the memorial is to remind future generations of what the world war generation did: namely, to go to war and save the world. So that future generations feel compelled to do likewise." (NY Times, "Greatest Veneration") The Memorial has met its obligation.



Adolf Loos would extend these ideals to culture as well, stating that “The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects” (20), which is admirable in its revolutionary zeal but which falls short of applicability to the meaning-making process. Arguably, any structure (or “utilitarian object”) has some ornamental aspect. Even the most streamlined Bauhaus baby cradle still employs geometric forms and primary colors as “ornamentation,” and even an unadorned beton-brut structure (such as Corbusier’s 1952 Unite d’Habitation) has some element of aesthetic ornamentation, even if merely the arrangement of the necessary windows and balconies. The World War II Memorial is not without ornament, of course, beyond its basic layout and structure, but the application of ornament is limited, and the focus, according to St. Florian, remains on conveying the vision and purpose of the era.

However, if one does have even a basic familiarity with the historical situation of the first half of the Twentieth Century, both internationally and domestically, Mies’ statement is revealed to have further layers of meaning. The “will of an epoch” here belies the criticisms of the World War II Memorial’s “fascistic” style since the will of that epoch—the 1930’s and 1940’s—was arguably

one of strong, authoritarian governmental structures<sup>64</sup>, very often made concrete in the forms of neo-Classical architecture. Even the oak and wheat wreaths on the pillars—to say nothing of the bronze eagles—reflect this overall spirit of the era in the West by representing agriculture and industry, images and symbols that were ubiquitously reflected in Soviet and German art and culture of the time as well. The will of the epoch, then, becomes much more than a recognition of American dominance when it is viewed as a particular moment across the West. Of course, in terms of defining the reality of what constitutes the will of an epoch, I would agree with Hayden White that “we may very well be able to come to a specifically historical understanding of reality only by way of the various fictions we impute to it” (Reflections, 877). Nonetheless, the reality of the epoch—and here I would suggest the reality is the place at which multiple fictions overlap—is one of a drive toward nationalism (regardless of the nation) and authority, exemplified by a neo-Classical architectural form representative of the epoch it memorializes.

Mies’ concept of the will of an epoch is also worth examination because of the World War II Memorial’s reinforcement of the idea of the Pax Americana that would follow the end of the war and last for decades. As stated, the World War II

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<sup>64</sup> Of course FDR was often criticized for being dictatorial in his ways (and one must admit his strong personality and methods did get the job done), so we as Americans were certainly not immune to the *Zeitgeist*.

Memorial was built in 2004, some sixty years after the end of the war and at a time in which the United States found itself in a less dominant economic and military world position, yet the message of the structure is proudly unambiguous. Rather than a simplistic denial of the declining influence of the United States in the past several decades, the Memorial may be seen to transcend the past by extending the will of that epoch into the present (and future). The intergenerational appeal of this structure lies in the clear transmission of the (perhaps bygone) ideal but the simultaneous making that ideal available for scrutiny and investigation under the circumstances of the present. Robert Stern notes, "Architecture is at its best, it seems to me, when it digs deep into culture in order to affirm, and sometimes even to reestablish, values and ideals. ... But at its most basic, architecture must be the reification of public values." (61)<sup>65</sup> To shake the values and ideals of our nation regarding our participation in World War II using architecture is actually counterproductive, I would agree with Stern, since because of its inherently more permanent nature the making concrete of ideas is an inescapable product of architecture. The World War II Memorial reifies our cultural ideas of the event

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<sup>65</sup> The word "reify" always feels unsatisfying. The German "Verdinglichung" or "Versachlichung" make for a much more made-concrete thing, even in the word to describe itself. Reify seems like a limp word for such a process.

and of the role of the United States in it in the most clear, unambiguous, and I would say successful means possible.

### **Part Three:**

#### **The Postmodern Conundrum: The Holocaust Memorial Museum**

No such impulse toward resolution or certainty is present in Postmodern architectural theory, in fact, the ambiguity, the dismantling and the unsettling are inherent processes within it. The Modernist desire to transcend the past is no longer relevant here; it has been replaced by a desire to interrogate, disturb and make uncertain. The Holocaust Memorial Museum stands as a concrete representation of this theory, and, as will be discussed, remains true to the spirit of openness and irresolution of the theory but in so doing remains restricted and confined by it at the same time.

The Holocaust Memorial Museum, also in Washington DC, presents a much more laden, layered and deliberately disorienting architectural view of one part of the same period in history. Though American involvement in liberating the concentration camps does come into play, the focus of the museum itself is on the actual inhuman acts committed during the Holocaust, told through exhibits of photographs, artifacts, videographic and written documentation, and personal narratives. I realize that comparing a memorial with a museum is fraught with all manner of problems, as I addressed in an earlier chapter, however, I propose to

look solely at the structure itself and arrangement—but not specific or particular content—of the exhibits and base this approach on the very name of the museum itself: The Holocaust Memorial Museum. Its structural design and architectural arrangement are certainly versions of “inscription” on the museum, but that is the extent of my discussion here. The individual exhibits themselves and their contributions to the meaning-making process are far beyond the scope of my project and are certainly better served by scholars of the Holocaust.

As for referencing the Holocaust itself, Oren Stier writes, “The assumption that the Holocaust is the ultimate reference point for any contemporary discussion of ethics, violence, totalitarianism, and the like...is becoming increasingly commonplace” (208). The Twentieth Century practice of elevating the Holocaust to the standard by which all other human actions—whether they are atrocities or philanthropies—are measured actually binds the present to the past and may paralyze us in an inability to move beyond the atrocity. Certainly any study of history faces this dilemma, however, the Holocaust finds itself presented as a catch-all event for human cruelty, reducible to a slogan (Never Forget), and firmly (and rightly so) defined as the absolute lowest example of modern human behavior.

Customarily, Holocaust memorials have been intended to acknowledge the suffering of the victims or the deeds of the perpetrators (Rosenfeld, 124) in a clearly referential manner, often relying upon objects (I remember piles of shoes at Mauthausen as my first experience) or photographs of concentration camps. Other well-known and poignant memorials to the atrocity include the iron gates at Buchenwald, a representation of an overturned chair at the Holocaust Museum in Berlin, and the monument to the victims of Nazism at the Platz der Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in Munich (the eternal flame of which, in a strange moment of irony in the 1980's, was under municipal review for being lit only during specific hours on certain days in order to conserve energy)—all of these representations are solid, clear in their message and traditional in scope. As James E. Young observes, ““People do not come to Holocaust memorials because they are new, cutting-edge or fashionable...(they) are produced specifically to be historically referential...(they) generally avoid referring hermetically to the processes that brought them into being.” (12)

The memorial function of exhibits is outside the scope of my current project, but an acknowledgement of the parallel and distinct process of meaning-making using exhibits or objects apart from their architectural housing should be briefly noted. The hall of photographs, the pile of eyeglasses, and camp uniforms of the Holocaust Memorial Museum elicit strong emotional responses from the observer,

but are not entirely (or perhaps are not at all) dependent upon their housing or the form of display for that result. Were those exhibits to be displayed in the storefront strip-mall museum of Holocaust survivor Eva Moses Kor in Terre Haute, Indiana, they would be no less powerful to the observer, as the artifacts themselves are the intended focus, not the surroundings into which they are placed. Here one thinks of the continuing appeal of a famous painting, say, when it is part of a traveling exhibit. The ephemeral nature of the exhibit is what draws the visitor—knowing the Rembrandt will only be available for a short time urges the visitor to make the trip—not the architectural housing which remains constant around it, which could be viewed at any time independently of the exhibit it holds. Curatorial concerns about layout, display and spotlighting are certainly to be acknowledged, however, the structural presence of a traditional museum is not the object visitors primarily come to see; it remains the backdrop for the exploration of a continual investigation of unusual objects on display. Though a piece of architecture may of course be designed as an exhibit (for example, a memorial), museums normally provide a space for the exhibition instead of becoming ones themselves. In this document, I do not feel it is necessary to elaborate in depth on the differences between a memorial and a museum because of the removal of the exhibits from my discussion. For my purposes, the structure of the Holocaust Memorial Museum—as a memorial rather than a museum—is considered distinct from the



exhibits it houses. The structure was designed to have an effect on the visitor alongside but not dependent upon the exhibits, and I rely upon that planned distinction to discuss only the structure, not the artifacts housed within it.

In *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, Francoise Choay discusses two causes of the "... progressive erasure of the memorial function of the monument": the first, a substitution of the ideal of beauty for the ideal of memory and the second, the development, perfection and diffusion of artificial memories (8). In a way that I find greatly problematic, the Holocaust Memorial Museum contains hundreds of applications of Choay's second point. The difficulty here does not lie in the artificiality of the memories, but rather that memory that is to be created here is the product of an intentional multiplicity of "diffuse" (which I read as watered-down and unspecific) memories which attempt to facilitate individual meaning-making processes through a deliberate and overwhelming disorientation. I would very much disagree that an erasure of a memorial function is even possible, regardless of ideals or artificiality of memories (specifically this last one, since as discussed in a previous chapter, memories are arguably always reimagined and recalled in some "artificial" form anyway), based solely on the most basic already-knowing that the memorial stands as a memorial. To suggest that a memorial could cultivate forgetting is an overstatement which is in danger

of being more repressive to the meaning-making processes of the observer than any overt message or purpose might be.

Since the Holocaust Memorial Museum is a more complicated structure than the World War II because of its numerous areas of display, my discussion will be limited primarily to the exterior, the Hall of Witness and the Hall of Remembrance in an attempt to discuss this drive toward a *Wiedergutmachung*. Again, as with Modernism, it is impossible within the scope of this document to summarize the entirety of Postmodern theory, architectural or otherwise, and thus I have chosen representative moments within the theory to illustrate the mechanisms by which the theory is effective but its application is ultimately unsuccessful.

In 1939 at the age of 9, James Ingo Freed, the architect who designed the Holocaust Memorial Museum, escaped Nazi Germany with his sister and settled in Chicago. In early adulthood he studied under Mies van der Rohe for a time, eventually joining "The Chicago Seven," a group of architects who challenged Mies' dominance in the city's architecture in the 1970's. By this time, he had been working with I. M. Pei's architectural firm for almost two decades and would continue his career as a part (and partner) of this architectural group until his death in 2005. Freed certainly was no strict Modernist in Mies' style, stating that

“...Once it is established that a minimalized building is okay, then as that building moves through the changes that inevitably occur to it over the years, it becomes minimalized in another way; it becomes marginalized” (Interview, 87). By Pei’s account, Freed did not have “a brand” (Chicago-Tribune) and designed and treated each structure separately rather than remaining true to a specific theory or style. His eclecticism and range dating back to the days of the Chicago Seven would inform his aesthetic throughout the decades, often resulting in a mix of styles from Modernist to neo-classical in the structures he designed<sup>66</sup>. It is difficult to determine to what extent, if at all, Freed would have considered more eclectic architecture reducible to the same process of marginalization as the minimalist designs of Mies in Chicago, but it is clear that his Holocaust Memorial Museum design, if only due to the nature of the event it memorializes, will likely suffer no such fate. This stylistic stance (or lack of one) may prove to be akin to the situation of the overall lack or dismantling of an established foundation in Postmodernist theory. Rather than being able to progress beyond Modernism entirely, he is caught in the Postmodern process of what Terry Smith calls “threats of suicide” (685) with the decisive action never being taken. If the action were taken, the

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<sup>66</sup> My favorite of Freed’s designs is the US Air Force Memorial in Arlington, VA. Aesthetically it is a gorgeous piece, and the symbolism (it mimics a maneuver performed by the Air Force Thunderbirds) is spot-on.

structure could no longer exist. Even pastiche and incorporation of varying styles nonetheless relies upon certain timeless elements of architectural form and construction without which it would not stand. Postmodern architecture cannot destroy itself in the way the theory demands.

When it came to the actual design, materials and outlay of the Holocaust Memorial Museum, multiple outside factors altered Freed's original design and influenced its final form. Whether trying to incorporate the healing or forgetting functions for survivors (which he discussed in an interview as difficult extremes within the range of Holocaust survivors' experiences to represent architecturally), to satisfy the board and city's requirements for the structure or to contextualize the event and the structure without becoming too reliant upon simulation or too close to a sanitized kitsch, Freed stated that he viewed his design as "... an evocation of the incomplete. Irresolution, imbalances are built in." (64) The lack of a stable foundation is indeed Freed's intent with this memorial and in many ways he accomplishes that goal, but I suggest that this deliberate and coerced instability creates difficulty in meaning-making and serves as an impediment to the expansion of meaningful dialogue and discussion as well. The specific, stable and known grounds for discussion are purposefully removed or separated, thus fracturing the experience between individuals by disallowing the consideration of

multiple perspectives from an acknowledged, though contingent, common and stable ground.

Here I acknowledge Freed's point that the individual may have more freedom in achieving his own meaning through this incompleteness, however, at the same time I assert that the imbalance and instability work at cross-purposes with establishing a platform for dialog between multiple individual meanings. The irresolution achieves multiple individual meanings (though, I would contend, so do certainty and resolution, only through different processes) but becomes its own albatross when meaning and thought struggle to achieve expression to others with a goal of arriving at a common ground. But this, in fact, this was exactly Freed's intent, as he expressed in his article "The Holocaust Memorial Museum," published in 1989 before the museum was built: "It is essential that people are left with what separates them more than with what joins them together." (64)

Freed's focus on the primacy of the individual memory at the cost of a communal understanding may be a good means of allowing Holocaust survivors to work through their own emotions regarding their experiences, but it does serve as a barrier to the rest of us, so many more in number, who have a desire to understand from the outside. The drive toward isolation of the individual via a deliberate and forced sense of confusion, unsettling and uncertainty could easily

be off-putting for someone who is trying to learn more about the event and what it says about us as humans, but perhaps that is the only thing that can happen regarding such an event. Freed writes, "I believe that architecture can do a lot, particularly if you are not absolutely overwhelmed by the need to come to closure..." and that "this building is decisively meant to put you in a deceptive frame of mind..." (65), hardly intentions that are inclusionary or in any way indicative of achieving peace or understanding.

This, of course, then raises the question of whether the Holocaust is an event that is understandable at all. Perhaps the Holocaust remains an event which simply cannot—or should not—be understood, and, if that is the case, a Postmodern stylistic form becomes a fitting representation of a specific and irresolvable moment in history. The continual lack of closure suggests that the wound of the Holocaust (as exemplified in the great crack in the Hall of Remembrance) can never be healed. As a memorial, it perhaps indicates to a degree that culturally we may never be able to relate or understand or learn from the event. This is not to say that healing and closure are universally achievable, of course, only that their deliberate preclusion from the memorial serves only to allow only for engagement and understanding at the individual's own emotional level of interpretation. This structure breaks down rather than builds thought and shakes the foundation so that nothing is left to build upon. As Freed states, the

structure is meant to be a “resonator of emotions” (73), but here it is worth mention that emotional response is surely subject to the same limitations as, say, memory and other psychological processes. If structure and architectonic language are the cornerstones of our vocabulary of thought, as I have suggested, then the structurelessness and instability of the Holocaust Memorial Museum as it is cannot allow room for the development of thought, only for the experience of emotion<sup>67</sup>.

Before Freed was awarded commission for the project, Holocaust survivor and author Elie Weisel said that he envisioned the memorial as a building that should disturb, but that it should not become a reconstruction, lest in so doing it devalue the Holocaust (61). Keeping in mind those two criteria and recognizing the practical limitations within which Freed had to work to satisfy all those involved (even the more practical, form-based ones such as the Commission’s insistence that the memorial itself be a hexagon), we might begin to look at the structure to evaluate the effectiveness of its design at the level of a phenomenological or emotional response, but also attempt to do so at the level of

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<sup>67</sup> I am not suggesting here that emotional responses are inferior or that they have no place in architecture, but I am pointing out that emotional response is quite different from philosophical discussion. Even Freed said “All my life I’ve done rational stuff...but reason doesn’t work here.” (73) I disagree with that viewpoint entirely and have discovered in writing this dissertation that I am “guilty” of harboring a desire for closure, certainty and purpose, but I feel that I am representative of neo-Modernism in that way. I loved Postmodern theory for a time, until I came to a point at which I could not find a way to progress using it. In other words, I realized it lacked the foundation I needed to think about the contemporary moment. It’s strange to think Postmodernism now feels dated.

a catalyst for philosophical discussion with others. This second attempt certainly defies Freed's insistence that it is not be interpreted on an intellectual level, but that exemption from intellectualization of the experience restricts attempts at shared understanding, closure and dialog—or at least the possibility of it. This is the moment at which the fissure within Postmodernism itself—that between architectural theory and application—begins to reveal itself as potentially unbridgeable.

Approaching the Holocaust Memorial Museum from 14<sup>th</sup> Street, the limestone exterior with three squared arches and square “windows” in a rounded portico (which Freed said he'd one day realized resembled SS officers' hats) lead the visitor behind them only to find that it is a false entrance which is open to the sky underneath, then visitors proceed to the actual entry point, a narrowish flat glass doorway and turnstile. Already the deception of which Freed spoke has begun. The rest of the exterior resembles alternately guard towers and windows which allow the visitor to neither look in nor out<sup>68</sup>. Freed toured Europe extensively for inspiration and observed, “the concentration camps all had gates, layers of lies, lies such as ‘Arbeit macht frei’” (62), and he employs the same

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<sup>68</sup> Freed toured many extermination camp sites, and the functionless windows throughout his structure reference those in the ward at Auschwitz in which Mengele performed his experiments.



strategies of deception without any accompanying explanation or certainty to recreate the feeling. Should lies and deception be the basis of our engagement with the Holocaust or with memory itself? Freed seems to think that meaning arises despite these forces, but the veils of secrecy and layers of untruths work to distance the individual from arriving at some meaningful interpretation<sup>69</sup>. Again, one is beginning to realize that there may ultimately be no understanding of this event, and it quickly becomes apparent that this structure is not providing us the means by which we might have attempted to achieve it.

Once inside the structure, the visitor is randomly led (“sorted”) through one of two entryways—a meaningless gesture, since all visitors end up in the Hall of Witness in a few steps anyway, but one which alludes to the random and confusing nature of the prisoners’ experiences. The Hall of Witness is several stories high, wide open, lit from above by an off-center skylight through trusses of crisscrossing steel beams. The walls on either side are red brick, and the opposing wall is concrete, again with square windows looking down from an upper level. A staircase rises to the right, narrowing toward the top, referencing railway tracks that appear to narrow in the distance, a physical detail which is visually appealing,

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<sup>69</sup> During my visit, my son and husband declared the structure “totally cool,” but the entire time, I felt like I was being exploited somehow. It did not make me want to think—now I see that was Freed’s intent, but I sure did not respond to the feeling in a positive way.

even psychically necessary. On the walkway above, other visitors are to be seen walking through, but one is not certain how they got there. On each of the red brick side walls are regularly placed rounded arches and squared windows with just enough ornamentation to distract, but not enough to satisfy or resolve. The visitor is supposed to have that feeling—distracted, almost overwhelmed—with no resolution or direction, but that feeling comes at a price. When speaking of memorialization in general, I suggested that the already-known element of the memorial, that is, the commemoration of an event or an individual with a foundation from which to make individual meaning, is the central foundation from which we develop our individual meanings, but rather than being absent in this memorial museum, the already-known of the memorialization process is turned on its ear. As if there could be no foundation from which to engage with the Holocaust. It is as if the structure deliberately excludes the visitor and strands him, physically but more importantly psychologically and intellectually, both inside and outside the event. The visitor is given no guidance, there is no clear direction to take or sense to be made of the structure. Again, this is problematic in terms of achieving meaning because, as much as the structure succeeds in deliberately disorienting the visitor, the disorientation then becomes the experience. Freed sought to avoid the creation of a sort of Holocaust amusement park in his design (61), but I would suggest that visitors are being taken for a

version of a ride nonetheless. The irresolution seems desperate. Perhaps this desperation accurately reflects the feelings of the victims of the Holocaust, but it disallows the formation of a stable means by which to resolve or even categorize the feelings.

The Hall of Witness achieves destabilization, to be sure, but it also manipulates the visitor to no real end and instead suggests, “you can never understand.” This message is antithetical to healing and closure, though, admittedly, those elements are nowhere to be found in the design or vision. Freed and the commission do not speak of closure, healing or forgiveness, but only of rupture, disturbance and uncertainty. The design is not intended to facilitate (or even make space for) understanding or forgiveness—it lays bare wounds and prohibits them from healing by denying the presence of a bed in which recovery can begin. In a medical sense, wound healing at its most basic requires elements of stability: first hemostasis, the stoppage of active bleeding, followed by the inflammatory stage in which blood clots first form, then epithelialization and contraction of the wound, and finally the development of collagen tissue and eventual scarring. There is no room afforded for a healing process at the Holocaust Memorial Museum, once is prohibited from achieving a form of psychological hemostasis, even as a first step, much less any solidity, contraction or scar formation. Of course Deleuze describes a scar as the sign not of a past wound but

of 'the present fact of having been wounded'" (Parr, 24), but that we as visitors cannot even achieve the first step, much less the final one of scarring/closure, only serves to remind us that we cannot learn and we cannot understand, and in so doing, it prohibits communication. It isolates.

The visitor is also isolated as he walks through the levels of the museum, always left wondering where to go next, often having to backtrack, many times arriving in the place he just left, and though one could describe the many architectural instances of this, in reality there is no need. It is an empty, endless repetition of instability. It does prohibit thought, as Freed intended. The Hall of Remembrance, however, the actual memorial part of the memorial museum, does allow for a slightly more secure anchoring of one's thought and provides a space for reflection and shelter. The hall is the hexagonal shape required by the commission, it is of granite, the floor red, the walls arranged around open triangles of light. Each wall panel has simply inscribed upon it the names of concentration camps, at first difficult to see in the black stone unless the visitor is at just the right angle. Then the names appear almost out of nowhere. Below these panels are two long, carefully arranged rows of votive candles which visitors can light. Looking up, one notices the ceiling again is structured with stained glass panels in triangular shapes, lighting the interior in what is clearly reminiscent of a house of

worship<sup>70</sup>. One is free to walk within the hexagon, approach the walls, and sit on the two rows of steps which descend from the walls to the sunken floor or on the slabs of stone in front of each panel. The visitor begins to feel an opportunity for sense of security, at least a physical manifestation of it, and to recognize that this may be a space for thought and analysis. As described, this Hall reflects many elements of neo-Modern design and suggests that we may be able to return to stability at the end of the journey. This seems like a good place to finally begin to process and think.

Not so fast, however, since the choice of inscriptions disrupts us by reintroducing the present having-been-wounded Deleuze speaks of: there is a simple quote “You are my witnesses” from Isaiah on one panel while another quotes from Deuteronomy: “Only guard yourself and guard your soul carefully, lest you forget the things your eyes saw, and lest these things depart your heart all the days of your life. And you shall make them known to your children, and to your children's children.” Bearing witness is an important construct in Holocaust studies, to be sure, but when a visitor who has no direct experience with the Holocaust nor its survivors—and, according to the Museum website, over 90% of

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<sup>70</sup> As part of his extensive travels to Europe, Freed visited many Polish synagogues, the influences of which are certainly visible here. And his focus on triangular and hexagonal shapes is in reference, of course, to patches prisoners wore in concentration camps.

its visitors are not Jewish—the task of bearing witness becomes an impossibility, particularly when one has just spent hours wandering through a structure that deliberately and systematically (as Modernist as that word sounds, the museum design is a carefully orchestrated plan of deception) isolated and separated them from the event, from others, and from intellectual engagement. How does one put themselves in another's shoes (to use a common artifact in Holocaust memorials) when the shoes are never intended to be tried on?

Here one thinks of the universal reminder “Never forget,” an absolutely crucial facet in how we might meaningfully come to terms with the Holocaust (and I would suggest how we approach thinking about the entire Twentieth Century). There can be no more important message, it seems. The difficulty with this memorial museum, however, is that in keeping to its Postmodern theoretical framework, running parallel to that vital message is one of “Never understand.” Deliberate un-investigation and manufactured instability reduce the available range our thoughts can achieve and simultaneously allow for and encourage unprocessed (perhaps unprocessable?) feelings and emotions to dominate. While this certainly reflects the instability and destabilization that is central to Postmodern theory, again, when it comes to the application of that theory to something beyond itself, the ersatz foundation of only a having-shaken-the-foundation quickly becomes recognized as insufficient ground.

As James E. Young writes of Holocaust museums in general, “In designing a museum for such memory, the architect is charged with housing memory that is neither at home with itself nor necessarily housable at all. It is memory redolent with images of the formerly familiar but that now seems to defamiliarize and estrange the present ...” (Jewish Museum, 3). Here Young blurs the distinction between artifact and memory, as his observation is not necessarily a circumstance particular to only a museum and not a memorial. A memorial can be viewed as an artifact writ large—an attempt at encapsulation—which houses memory in the same process as a museum, only the memorial in a sense has become the artifact. Rather than housing individual objects, a memorial may be thought to house a representational metaphorical image, but the memory housed in both is equally suspect and fluid. The Holocaust Memorial Museum does indeed house exhibits effectively. They are aesthetically and carefully arranged, the hall of photographs is emotionally powerful, and the deliberately over-crowded elevator ride is as evocative as it is anxiety-producing. These elements, however, are more of those of a “Holocaust amusement park,” which Freed sought to avoid creating. The housing of the artifacts is successful, the housing of memory is not.

The housing of memory is another matter altogether, as images and artifacts are not memory, nor is the event, nor is one’s own experience or even one’s “own” memory. When Young speaks of and Freed designs with intent of housing

memory, the endeavor cannot ever be fully successful, long before it. As Robert Stern writes, “Architecture is the most public of all the arts. The most obdurate of the arts. It is also the least personal of the arts” (61). Architecture, because of its public nature, cannot achieve the housing of private memory across individuals; it can only allow for a space for private memory to become introduced into the public sphere, and even that is suspect. If we look at architecture as Stern describes it—public, obdurate and impersonal—it is not surprising that Postmodern theory could have difficulty in gelling with or being of concrete benefit to such an art. “Public” connotes an undeniable presence, “obdurate” connotes an unyielding presence, and “impersonal” connotes an indifferent presence. These parameters—outlined by a Postmodern architect, no less—demonstrate the immovable and inflexible nature of architecture, and simultaneously shed light on the incongruity of Postmodern theory and its application to the art. Architecture is too present, too *there*, to be successfully dismantled.

In a conversation with architect Peter Eisenman, Jacques Derrida does, in fact, describe architecture as the most present of the arts, and as a part of that definition, suggests that it has the strongest reference to absence (*Chora L*, 8). The theory is intellectually effective; the connection between presence and absence is clear and generative of all manner of thought. However, I would suggest that in



all styles and applications of architecture, not only memorial, these references to absence of life, of individuals, of morality, of history, of understanding, and of meaning are reduced, if not altogether removed, by a too-abundant presence. Too much presence—and too much present—can preclude our ability to recognize and acknowledge absence, and this perhaps represents the very cornerstone of the rift between Postmodern theory and attempts at its application. Freed's Holocaust Memorial Museum in theory intends to illuminate the absent; it intends to separate, to isolate and to confuse. The latter goal is achieved in his structure, the former is revealed to be impossible to achieve. The *thereness* of the Memorial Museum—its design and its very standing as architecture—demonstrate the incompatibility of the theory with the physical representation.

These realizations arguably could not have been made at the time Derrida wrote or even the time Freed designed the structure. Only after now decades of elapsed time and progression of thought can the having-been-shaken structure re-emerge with the clear need for a foundation. Postmodern theory, though illuminating the shortcomings of a structuralist position through the processes of deconstruction, destabilization and a focus on multiplicity, was not able to provide a foundation in terms of translating the theory into practice. The result has been an abundance of perspectives, valuable and necessary but fragmentary and exclusionary in their own right (since who or what theory could ever mindfully

include them all?). The return to naming this current era with forms of Modernism suggests that a new direction is not yet available, and in that way suggests that post-structuralism cannot sustain its own weight and provide a sufficient platform for progression of thought. More so than a new theory, Post-structuralism can be viewed as a critique of a theory, a critique that ultimately could not stand on its own. It has been my contention throughout that a return to that original theory is necessary, that we are not in a position to move on from it quite yet.

Here I would suggest that rather than returning to an embodiment of what Maria Lugones calls a “lover of purity” in our partial return to Modernism as a means of defining the contemporary moment, we are instead positioned to engage in a version of what she calls “world-traveling”. Though Lugones gives examples of traveling between “worlds” as a woman who can shift between mainstream constructions and others in which she finds herself more at home (3), this concept can be extended to incorporate engagement with theory and our interrogation of our own position in this contemporary moment as well. She discusses situations in which one is at ease with others because of a shared history (she uses the example of “Do you remember poodle skirts?”) that can be distinct from a direct shared experience. This viewpoint may suggest a direction in which we can return to conceptualizing a type of foundation (the presence of multiple worlds) without remaining bound by traditionally dominant structures of Modernism or finding

ourselves with completely dismantled structures of Postmodernism. The recognition of a shared history *across* worlds is to my thinking a likely path toward a definition of our current moment. Even though—perhaps especially because—Lugones states that these worlds may construct us in ways we don't even understand or accept (10), the recognition of the presence of these worlds points to a shift into this new post-Postmodern period of Modernism, whatever we may call it. This period is one of recognition and acknowledgement, reflection and investigation, and we are remapping the ground underneath ourselves in an attempt to situate this period in the history of thought. But we are not finished yet.

## **Part Four: Where Are We (Going)?**

In the high period of Postmodern theory, what might be termed the ‘sanctity’ of the work of the memorial was called into question—not to destroy or minimize the work, but rather to encourage the viewer to experience the monument, the event and even history itself in an alternate way, or as Heidegger suggested, to cause the foundation to totter. This may have been the only direction available at what we thought to be the “end” of Modernism and, while it was certainly revolutionary—and likely necessary—in terms of thought, currently we find ourselves situated in an intellectual position of “after Postmodernism.” To be sure, after the critique of Postmodernism, it is not enough to say that memorial architecture can be linked to a preconceived memory, a certainty of truth, or a commonly-understood experience, however, it can be said that this critical unbuilding has revealed that Modernist architectural form and theory have stood firm under and after the dismantling process in a way that Postmodern theory could not. In addition, Modern architecture has been exposed for its weaknesses but its strengths have simultaneously been revealed. I have suggested throughout this document that memorial architecture is most successful when it provides space for the construction of multiple individual meanings, stands as a platform

for the discussion of each of those meanings, allows us to critique our internal processes of memory and especially provides room for the intellectual freedom to examine, question and push to their limits the means of memorialization at hand. I have argued that those goals are best served by a clearer, simpler, less ornamented and inscribed structure and have suggested that only after the radical and destabilizing process of interrogation by Postmodernism could this have been realized. In other words, in many ways we have had to assess ourselves via a return to Le Corbusier's vision of "putting things in order," only perhaps a modified, more inclusive type of order.

Having been shaken but not dismantled by Postmodern theory, this cultural moment can be envisioned as one in which we find ourselves situated on the threshold between Modernism and a future "-ism," which cannot yet be named or even recognized from our too-close position within it, that may represent a significant shift in the way we conceptualize existence. Whether that shift will be post-human, the virtual or technology-driven, or something else is not to be recognized at the moment. Recent scholarship is struggling to define what to use as a heuristic term, sometimes choosing "contemporary" within the art world (Smith, 683). This is hardly a satisfactory descriptor for the long term, as it not one which separates this period meaningfully from any other use of the word contemporary, but this necessity of a heuristic descriptor illuminates the difficulty

of defining the particular naming process of a period of partial-return-to-Modernism-after-Postmodernism. To me, this moment is one in which scholars ought to look more closely at where we now situate ourselves, perhaps not even to project a vision as to what may come next, but only to begin to describe what this moment is from within. A review of recent scholarship reveals that the new attempts at a name always make reference to Modernism, and the idea or theory is very loose at best in its description of where we actually are in the moment.

Scholars within the art world are primarily those who have attempted to do the naming, though it extends to the disciplines of philosophy and language and literature studies as well. In a 2006 online essay entitled “The Death of Postmodernism,” British scholar Alan Kirby describes the current period as “pseudo-modernism” and states that this period actually “takes the world away” through the transition to technological interactions, arguing that individuals are both newly powerful and newly helpless (he gives the example of communicating across the planet but needing to be reminded to eat your vegetables) to understand themselves after Postmodernism. He states that we are more or less self-infantilized at the same time we are ever more sophisticated, and, while I agree with some of his observations,<sup>71</sup> his overall stance seems to be yet another critique

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<sup>71</sup> On a pessimistic day I agree with them—including his view that technology allows for a return to “Medieval barbarism” in the posting of beheadings and more gruesome acts available at a click—though I

that offers no new foundation and is arguably more inapplicable even than Postmodernism in that the world is now “taken away” in a pseudo-Modern situation. In his analysis, we are left without not just a foundation, but without an entire world. This line of development taken to its concrete application would quickly fall into the “threats of suicide” category ascribed to Postmodernism—all cannot be virtual or become virtual in the same way that dismantling could not actually be extended to dismantling architecture. Without an “actual” world to contrast it with, the word “virtual” becomes meaningless, and the possibility of an entirely virtual world is as unattainable as a completely dismantled one.

Nicolas Bourriaud, Director of the French Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, in 2009 postulated “altermodernism” as a possible name for this moment, highlighting the role of the artist as what he calls “a cultural nomad.” In an otherwise very difficult definition of altermodernism (from the Latin *alter* as “different” or “other”), two comments seem to give a sense of a definition to the current period—if that sense is only to reiterate that we aren’t exactly sure where it is we’re going. The first of these is what he terms an “assumed heterochrony.” Bourriaud says that in order to follow a period in which the grand narrative has

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do think he overstates our position in terms of how far this applies across Western culture overall—and an apparently non-reflective trajectory in our interactions with ourselves and others.

been exposed as unstable, the positioning of human events in a setting of “multiple temporalities” has become representative of our current position and that altermodernism is a “positive experience of disorientation through an art-form exploring all dimensions of the present.” Both of these statements are intriguing in that they allude to a more expansive and inclusive assessment of our current position, but again they fall short of making a definitive statement about the moment. Exploring all dimensions of the present is certainly in keeping with my attempt to introduce a platform for discussion of ideas in this moment as well, but Bourriard is as trapped in the moment as I, and that leads us to the inability to define what the “present” actually entails<sup>72</sup>.

Postmodernism has served a vital function as an outgrowth of and response to Modernism, a necessary critique of a long-prevailing way of cultural engagement, but it has not proven itself to represent a sea change in our intellectual progression, nor a means of integration, only as an experiment of/in opposition to Modernism and only as another possible way of affording room for discussion of our cultural position. Here I am only considering a small segment of the entirety of theory and discussing the inherent difficulty of its application to

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<sup>72</sup> Don't tell Bourriard I said that, he would surely find it insulting. And yet another name for this moment, by Ben Davis, Editor of ArtNet magazine, is “Semi-Post-Modernism.” It's worth a fun footnote for yet another affix to Modernism, but his essay is ultimately another critique only.



architectural form in terms of the end of the process. As stated earlier, the theoretical “threats of suicide” could not be carried out in the physical manifestations of architecture, and I am only here suggesting that those same incongruities may extend to our ways of thinking as well. If the philosophical language of thought is based in architectonics, the question that naturally follows is to what degree Postmodern theory has been able to carry out its threats regarding our structuring of that thought and to what degree, if at all, the language of philosophy has been altered by the experience. Here I would agree with Terry Smith and extend his observations about art and architecture to our thinking about thinking as well. Though thought continually changes as a result of ongoing critique, the traditional language of philosophy nonetheless remains dependent upon an architectonic lexicon. In much the same way that a structure is restricted by physical dimensions allowing it to stand, philosophical language is restricted by conceptual dimensions allowing it to convey basic structural ideas. We cannot have both entirely dismantled thought and retained the structures allowing that dismantling to occur, which leaves us in the current—or contemporary—period of uncertainty. A different type of uncertainty, though, than that arrived at by Postmodernism’s deliberate pursuit of it, an arguably less direct and intentional one, and one that is at the moment indefinable. We are still struggling to find our theoretical footing after Postmodernism, even though (and perhaps especially

because) many aspects of Modernism have proven themselves to be solid and reliable.

Postmodernism was a necessary development but, considering its own name, was and is restricted by the confines of an as-yet inescapable Modernist structuring. While Postmodern theory shook us out of our complacency, it afforded us nothing new to stand on. Here I acknowledge that in time it may be revealed that I am completely misrepresenting the current position, but right now it appears we are still entirely too enmeshed in the trees to draw up the parameters of the forest just yet. What will ultimately follow Modernism may not even be within our grasp to conceptualize at the moment at all. I think there is simply no way for us to know in the present. Svetlana Boym's "Off-Modernist Manifesto," which again primarily addresses art as the means of defining the moment, presents a thought refreshing in its candor<sup>73</sup>—perhaps we are making a lateral move, like, she says, a knight in a chess game. This is a surprising comment—the idea that we might be moving laterally—because it challenges the notion that we are moving *beyond* Postmodernism and simultaneously underscores (perhaps unintentionally) our continual return to Modernism by revealing our inherent

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<sup>73</sup> Though overall the document is an off-putting and unpleasant read that uses language in what sounds like almost a parody of Postmodernist writings in a Modernist manifesto suit.

desire (mine included, admittedly) to look for a forward progress. Maybe we are not able to tell where we're going because we are too busy looking forward to notice that our current movement is in a sideways direction.

Despite the difficulty of assessing the direction or name of the moment and the direction in which we now are going, my argument throughout has been that, considering architecture only, Postmodernism does a less satisfactory job of allowing room for discussion to take root than Modernism. If we are to recognize the next era when it arrives—and historically I wonder to what degree we can successfully achieve an understanding of an epoch without a temporal distance from it<sup>74</sup>—then assessing where we are at this moment is much more difficult without an acknowledged common ground from which to ascertain a version of synthesis of our current cultural position, before speculating where it is we might be going. As we have seen, Postmodernism made that identification more difficult to articulate. While Modernism afforded us some room, Postmodernism in shaking us up may have thrown us off track somewhat in being able to situate ourselves and our thought.

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<sup>74</sup> And here I can't help but think of the phrase "living history" (Hillary Clinton book or otherwise) and how that is applied to reenactments of past events. Living *through* history is something else entirely.

Perhaps we are, simply put, just in a period of shaken-up-Modernism. Modernism's arms are long-reaching, after all, and thinking that we have somehow transcended it (or its influence) at this point seems premature, and here as evidence stand the many names given to this current moment, all of which still contain some reference to Modernism. Fifteen years into a new millennium, the Twentieth Century still defines the way we identify ourselves, and in a parallel manner, our thinking about thinking is still defined by its relationship to Modernism. In order to begin to understand where we might be going, we have to be able to discuss where we are now, meaningfully, in a way that allows for variance but does not isolate based on it. A thought excursion, only on a longstanding cultural level, reflecting multiple times and directions and perspectives. Maybe this period is just one of getting back up and looking around after we got the wind knocked out of us.

Though the discussion and the process of arriving at a name surely will continue for years, we can say with some certainty borne of experience and reflection that Postmodernism—as represented architecturally—did not serve us well as a definitive means of furthering that discussion in a new direction separated from Modernism. To discuss in real time our thoughts are at this cultural moment, in light of where we've been and in anticipation of what is to come,

requires the establishment of a common ground in order to name our epoch—or, more probably, to have it be named for us decades from now.

Because architecture is, as Derrida says, the most present of the arts, it might be the best way we can translate our current thoughts and get them to endure over time. And this is where memory, metaphor and especially the architectonic language of philosophy come into play: our reliance on structures employed since antiquity to discuss our own thoughts continue to this day, but the methods we use to define and communicate them underwent a serious reevaluation in Modernism. Modernism represented a major cultural restructuring in a way that, I argue, Postmodernism did not. My only intent throughout this document has been to suggest ways we might look at and discuss where thought is now without having to identify exactly where we are. I'm not sure we could know.

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